

Desolate Era

(莽荒纪)

Book 09

Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake

I Eat Tomatoes

(我吃西红柿)

Story Description:

Fate had never been kind to Ji Ning. Wracked by illnesses and infirm his entire life on Earth, Ning knew early on that he would die as a teenager. What he didn't know was that there really was such a thing as life after death, and that the multiverse was a far larger place than he thought. A lucky twist of fate (one of the few in Ning's life) meant that Ning was reborn into a world of Immortals and monsters, of Ki Refiners and powerful Fiendgods, a world where Dynasties lasted for millions of years. A world which is both greater...and yet also smaller...than he ever could imagine. He would have the opportunity to join them, and in this life, Ning swore to himself, he would never let himself be weak again! The Era he was born into was a Desolate one, but Ning would make it his era.

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

Chapter 1: New Raindragon Guards

The winding Crimson Dragon Mountains stretched off into the endless horizons. Even Immortal cultivators couldn't see to the end of them.

Atop one of its peaks, an enormous teleportation array began to glow with light. Whoooosh! Ji Ning and the rest of the fifty two suddenly appeared within the formation.

"That was fast." Ning glanced at his surroundings. Although he had already used the array once, the speed at which it transported a person still caused him to sigh in amazement.

"Wait here. Soon, the Raindragon Guards will send people to welcome you," said a red-faced old man in a high voice. He was one of the ten plainly dressed elders who were located around the array and guarded it.

Ning's group thus obediently walked out of the array, waiting next to it quietly. Very soon, a large, wide ship swooped down from the distant clouds, causing waves of air to emanate from around it as it landed atop the peak.

An incomparably ravishing pink-dressed maiden flew down from this large ship. Behind her was a group of similarly alluring women. For a moment, it was as though a host of fairies had descended into the mortal world. And then, the spirit-beasts flew down as well, each of which immediately moved towards the cultivators.

"Uncle White!" Ning instantly recognized the Whitewater Hound, who was also amidst the group of spirit-beasts. The Whitewater Hound had a look of surprise and delight his eyes. Over the past three months, he had grown increasingly concerned. When the master of a spirit-beast died, the spirit-beast would regain its freedom, and they would sense when that occurred. Over the past period of time, spirit-beasts would often depart and fly away, and as one after another left, the spirit-beasts who remained began to understand that quite a few cultivators had died!

"Ning, son." Uncle White looked towards Ning. Suddenly, he saw the head of the little azure snake, wrapped around Ning's wrist. He couldn't

help but say in surprise, “Ning, son, this snake is...?”

“This is an Azure Skysnake,” Ning sent mentally to him. “She’s that Azure Skysnake who I battled in the past, when I adventured through Eastmount Marsh. This time, we were lucky enough to meet yet again in the wild marshes of the Gaol Mountains, and it can be said that we experienced a life-and-death event together. Perhaps because I saved her, she voluntarily offered to become my spirit-beast. And so...that’s how it happened.”

The Whitewater Hound nodded gently. He looked towards the Azure Skysnake with friendliness in his eyes while mentally saying to Ning, “Azure Skysnakes will often discover some treasure sites, and they have astonishing potential for growth. They are indeed quite suited for you, Ning.”

“So you are ‘Uncle White’?” Qingqing sent to him. The Whitewater Hound looked at her, amusement in his eyes. “You were good brothers with Ji Ning’s father, right? I heard that you are from Swallow Mountain as well. So am I. It can be said that we share the same hometown. Myself, Master, and you, Uncle White...we can be described as the Three Heroes of Swallow Mountain!”

.....

While Ning and the other cultivators were chatting with their spirit-beasts, the group of beautiful, alluring women stared with curiosity towards them. Their leader, the pink-robed woman, waited for a short while, then finally said, “Everyone...” The fifty two all looked towards her.

“First, let me congratulate you all for having survived. You may address me as ‘Daoist Yulan’.” Her flesh beneath the pink robe seemed both visible and hidden, and her voice was even more irresistibly charismatic. Ning’s retainer, Cloudjade, could be described as possessing innate beauty and seductiveness, but the charisma of this woman clearly came from some technique or some secret art which she had trained in. But her allure was even more powerful! In addition, she was a Primal Daoist; this made it so that even Wanxiang Adepts were susceptible to their Dao-

hearts being affected by her charm.

“Each of you, please produce your corpses of Wanxiang Diremonsters for my inspection. I’ll review them, one by one.” Daoist Yulan looked at each of them, her eyes filled with a seductive, alluring look. “For those who have not acquired Wanxiang Diremonster corpses, you should stand forward now, so as to help save me some time.”

Immediately, seven figures walked out. As for Ning and the rest, they produced Wanxiang Diremonster corpses for inspection.

Diremonster bodies were innately different from human bodies. Humans bodies were, by nature, weak; unless they trained as Fiendgods, their bodies would be incredibly fragile. Diremonsters, however, were different; many of them possessed certain innate abilities that granted them mighty physical strength. Although they were far from being a match for Fiendgods, they could be considered as standing somewhere between humans and Fiendgods. Many monstrous races would even transform some of the deadlier parts of their bodies into intrinsic magic treasures; from this, one could see how extraordinary their bodies were. This was why it was quite easy to tell, from a corpse, if a monster had been of the Wanxiang level or not.

“Mm.” Daoist Yulan spread out her divine sense, instantly sending it into the heads of each Diremonster corpse. After but a single breath, Daoist Yulan nodded gently. “Very good. They’ve all reached the Wanxiang Diremonster level.”

“The seven of you, stay over here. Later, someone will come to arrange for you to leave.” Daoist Yulan looked at the seven rather haggard-looking figures, then turned her gaze to Ning’s group. “As for the forty five of you, take your spirit-beasts and bring them aboard my ship.”

Moments later, the incomparably alluring Daoist Yulan led Ning’s group aboard her ship.

.....

“This Daoist Yulan...jeeze...” Ning’s forehead had a faint sheen of sweat, and he even felt a faint fire begin to stir in his loins. In the past, Ning

hadn't been moved by even bewitching figures like Cloudjade or Ninelotus. However, the allure of this Daoist Yulan clearly stemmed from some technique or art which she had trained in. How could the mesmerizing technique of a Primal Daoist be so easily shrugged off?

The nearby Mu Northson's face was completely flushed. In fact, some of the Wanxiang Adepts even had bloodshot eyes by now. However, their tempered Dao-hearts allowed them to maintain their calm, in the end.

As for Daoist Yulan? She swept them with a gaze, then let out a soft laugh. This gaze...this laugh...instantly, quite a few Wanxiang Adepts closed their eyes.

"Doombringer, what a doombringer," Ning murmured silently to himself. "No wonder, in my previous life on Earth, there were so many historical records of cases where beautiful women brought doom and destruction to entire nations. These Wanxiang Adepts all have sturdy Dao-hearts, and yet they are all so drawn to her...if she were to go charm a mortal Emperor, she would easily be able to cause that Emperor to no longer care for his empire, and only care for her."

.....

The ship continued to fly through the clouds. Daoist Yulan waved her hands, and one book after another began to fly towards Ning and the rest of the forty five.

"Congratulations to you forty five for having become new Raindragon Guards!" Daoist Yulan continued, "Now that you have become Raindragon Guards, you have gained some of the special privileges belonging to the Raindragon Guard. At the same time, you also have some duties and responsibilities to the Raindragon Guard. Take a close look."

Ning and the others began to flip through the books. As he did, Ning secretly sighed in amazement. "The Raindragon Guard truly lives up to its reputation. This book's description of the special powers they possess... the Raindragon Guard truly is incomparably overbearing and dominating! Its Immortal cultivators cloak themselves in imperial authority, and can all but act with impunity."

The Northmont clan of Stillwater could only act as they pleased in Stillwater Commandery, but Raindragon Guards could do the same in virtually any commandery in the entire Grand Xia Dynasty!

“Responsibilities?” Ning gave them a quick glance. They were fairly simple.

One-clawed Raindragon Guards – Every ten years, they had to complete a mission worth a single karmic point (these were the most ordinary of missions).

Two-clawed Raindragon Guards – Every hundred years, they had to complete missions worth a total of a hundred karmic points (the value of a normal two-clawed mission).

Three-clawed Raindragon Guards – Every thousand years, they had to complete missions worth a total of ten thousand karmic points (the value of a normal three-clawed mission).

Four-clawed Raindragon Guards – Every ten thousand years, they had to complete missions worth a total of a million karmic points (the value of a normal four-clawed mission).

Five-clawed Raindragon Guards – These were the highest ranking members of the Raindragon Guard. They were able to mobilize the armies of the Raindragon Guard, and were comparable to a Marquis in power.

.....

The book described the basic requirements and responsibilities of Raindragon Guards!

For Wanxiang Adepts like Ji Ning, carrying out one mission every ten years was enough. For example, if you carried out a minor mission like killing Bei Zishan, upon completion, the Raindragon Guard would no longer bother you for a time.

Some Loose Immortals would spend thousands or tens of thousands of years between carrying out missions. By comparison, their lives were fairly relaxed.

"This isn't so bad." Northson sent to Ning, "Senior apprentice-brother, being a Raindragon Guard isn't that hard. Based on what this says...we can just go ahead and carry out a 'ten karma' mission. After doing so, we can relax for a century."

"We can relax, yes, but in doing so, we won't be able to acquire any secret arts, divine abilities, or magic treasures," Ning sent back.

"Uh..." Northson immediately flipped through a few more pages, then stared. "Whaaat? Divine abilities and secret arts require the exchange of karma points? And also have requirements in terms of rank?"

Many divine abilities could only be acquired by two-clawed or three-clawed Raindragon Guards. However, there was one exception; if one became a Keeper of the Raindragon Guards!

.....

"Done reading?" Daoist Yulan swept her gaze towards this new class of Raindragon Guards. "It can be said that we Raindragon Guards have the most plentiful number of secret arts and divine abilities in this entire world. Even the Northmont clan of Stillwater cannot compare with us in this regard, because we are the most powerful force of the entire Grand Xia Dynasty."

"However, these many divine abilities and precious treasures cannot be casually granted to you. After all...it wouldn't be quite fair or equitable for all of you to simply have to do one mission, then relax for centuries and gain access to all these things." Daoist Yulan continued, "Thus, you have two choices. The first is to just train slowly; after you become two-clawed or three-clawed Raindragon Guards, you'll slowly gain chances to acquire divine abilities."

Ning and everyone else nodded. Two-clawed Raindragon Guards were comparable to ordinary Primal Daoists in power; Bloodshadow was one such example. Three-clawed Raindragon Guards, however, were probably comparable to Loose Immortals. To wait that long to train...would probably be too late.

"The second choice is to become a member of the Keepers of the

Raindragon Guard, the most incomparably loyal soldiers of the Grand Xia Dynasty! If you do so, the Raindragon Guard will naturally expend quite a bit of effort in training you!" Daoist Yulan swept them with her gaze. "Think well on this. Whether now, a year from now, ten years from now, or a century from now...we will always welcome you to join us as Keepers."

Ning and the others understand quite well that ordinary Raindragon Guards were like deputies or retainers! They were quite free, and they had some special powers...but the Keepers of the Raindragon Guard essentially made up the devoted armies of the Grand Xia Dynasty!

Actually, early on in the history of the Raindragon Guard, every single Raindragon Guard was mandated to be governed in the same manner. Keepers were now governed. However, Immortal cultivators, by their very nature, pursued carefree, unbound lives! The more talented an Immortal cultivator, the less they liked to be governed. Thus, if the rules were too strict, the only result would be for many of the most peerless, powerful, talented of cultivators to end up leaving the Raindragon Guard.

Thus, the Raindragon Guard, in order to be able to draw in many elites from around the world, finally set up a stand-alone 'Keepers' organization.

As a result, many lone wanderers and solitary Loose Immortals who had been training in their own private mountains all decided to join the Raindragon Guard. The Raindragon Guard's power and reputation instantly skyrocketed, and they became the undisputed number one military force of the entire Grand Xia Dynasty! There were many major powers who were secretly members of the Raindragon Guard, and most likely, there were very few people in the entire Grand Xia Dynasty who could enumerate them all.

No one knew about all of the old freaks and talented figures who lay hidden within the Raindragon Guard. And today...Ning had become a member of the Guard as well. Although, he was of course the most ordinary type; a one-clawed Raindragon Guard.

Chapter 2: Torch Dragon's Eye

Two hours later.

Ji Ning and the others, after having acquired a Raindragon Guard talisman, were guided by Daoist Yulan towards a beautiful palace, filled with sculptures and paintings. The palace was roughly three hundred meters high, and it took up nearly three thousand meters in length.

"This is our Dao Repository," Daoist Yulan said with a smile. "It holds countless techniques, secret arts, and various skills. You can take a good look; your spirit-beasts, however, cannot."

"Uncle White, Little Qing, wait for me outside." Ning and Northson immediately followed the others, entering this palace.

The Dao Repository of the Raindragon Guard was simply too vast. "It's far larger than even the Dao Repository Palace of our Black-White College," Northson said with a sigh. "Yeah." Ning stared about himself as well as he walked forward.

"There are 360 different types of Immortal-ranked Ki Refining techniques? This, this is..." A shocked shout rang out from afar. Upon hearing these words, the faces of Ning and Northson changed as well. 360? Even the Black-White College only had 28!

"There actually are Ki Refining techniques that allows one to reach the 'Pure Yang' level? A level which is above even Immortal-level Ki Refining techniques?" Another shocked cry from afar. Upon hearing this, Ning and Northson immediately ran over.

There was an incomparably, exquisitely carved crystalline table here, and atop it were two books. The covers of the books had starry points of light drifting atop them, and next to the books was a silver-haired youth. The silver-haired youth had one of these starry books in his hands. While reading through the book, he called out in shock, "It actually requires anywhere from a thousand to fifteen hundred kilograms of liquefied elemental essence to break through to the Wanxiang level?"

“Is it that incredible?”

“Immortal-level Ki Refining techniques generally only require four hundred to eight hundred kilograms.” Quite a few people ran over, and some of them moved quite quickly. Although Ning and Northson both saw those two books on the table, they were instantly snatched up by the other new Raindragon Guards.

While reading through it, the other new guards shook their heads and sighed in shock. “If one trains in this Pure Yang-level technique, then one’s chances of reaching the Void stage and becoming an Earth Immortal is several times higher than if one uses an Immortal-level technique. The sturdier one’s foundation is, the better!”

Many of the people present had never even heard of Pure Yang techniques. They only knew of four levels of techniques; Mortal-ranked, Earth-ranked, Heaven-ranked, and Immortal-ranked; they hadn’t imagined that there was an even more powerful, Pure Yang-rank. It must be understood that not even the Black-White College, which had produced a Celestial Immortal, had such a technique.

“You don’t understand.” The smug voice of a fairly attractive green-robed woman rang out. “Ki Refining techniques can be divided into Mortal-ranked, Earth-ranked, Heaven-ranked, Immortal-ranked, and Pure Yang-ranked techniques! However, generally speaking, even the most supreme and most firmly established of organizations, such as the Northmont clan of Stillwater and the other Marquisates, will only have access to Immortal-ranked Ki Refining techniques. Only the likes of the Raindragon Guard, the most powerful organization of the entire, vast empire of the Grand Xia Dynasty, has a Pure Yang-ranked technique!”

“Not even the Stillwater clan of Northmont has one?” Ning mused silently to himself, “Perhaps they do, but don’t dare make it public.” After all, the many Marquisates of this vast world might possess certain special powers and techniques, but they would all have to hide them, for fear that the Grand Xia Dynasty would suspect them of desiring to rebel!

“What?!”

“Only Keepers of the Raindragon Guard can train in this? And even Keepers have to have a thousand karmic points before acquiring it?”

“Ordinary Raindragon Guards like us will never have the chance to learn it? I wanted to switch to training in a Pure Yang-level technique!”

Soon, these people flipped to the final pages regarding the Pure Yang-level techniques. Instantly, they all began to curse and moan.

Ning had a thought. Swoosh! He moved directly towards the table containing the 360 Immortal-ranked Ki Refining techniques, immediately beginning to flip through them. The other new Raindragon Guards also seemed to have thought of something, and they, too, came to flip through the books.

“Keepers of the Raindragon Guard need a hundred karmic points to learn this. One-clawed Raindragon Guards need ten thousand karmic points to learn this. Two-clawed Raindragon Guards need a hundred thousand karmic points to learn this...” Ning flipped through the requirements, then shook his head.

In the end, Immortal-ranked Ki Refining techniques were still quite precious. For ordinary Raindragon Guards to acquire ten thousand karmic points required them to risk their lives repeatedly. They would probably have to battle for dozens of years before accumulating enough.

“Cruel.”

“That’s just cruel.”

Quite a few cultivators shook their heads. Ning shook his head as well. Originally, he had wanted to switch to training in a water-attribute Pure Yang-ranked technique, but unfortunately, all of those techniques were reserved for the Keepers!

It was quite common for one to change in techniques. For example, while he was at the Swallow Mountain region, Ning had trained in the quite average [Water Element Art], while after arriving at the Black-White College, he had established his foundations with the [Flowing Watersource]. If he then switched to training in an even-better Pure Yang

technique...although it wouldn't be as good as if he had trained in it from the very beginning, it would still be superb.

Unfortunately...how could the Raindragon Guard so easily allow this technique to be learned by others?

.....

Soon, they arrived at the second floor of the palace.

"It's so hard to learn divine abilities as well."

"There are 89 divine abilities, but more than half are reserved strictly for Keepers!"

"The requirements for the Heavenly Transformation technique are the lowest...one-clawed Raindragon Guards only need ten karmic points!"

Ning and the others flipped through one divine ability manual after another.

[Heavenly Transformation], [Rainbowflame Evasion], [Moving Mountains, Overturning Seas]...these techniques all caused Ning's eyes to go red wth lust. Each of them had different requirements. [Heavenly Transformation] was naturally the easiest to learn, while the hardest was a divine ability known as the [Torch Dragon's Eye]; it required one to be a Keeper, and also have accumulated ten million karmic points!

"Ten million?" Ning was secretly speechless. He had heard of the [Torch Dragon's Eye] long ago; this was a divine ability that only appeared in the legends, and was a divine ability on par with the likes of [Houyi Shooting the Suns]. He hadn't expect to encounter it here, today. Clearly, the roots of the Grand Xia Dynasty were incomparably deep, for it to be able to produce such a legendary divine ability.

"The [Torch Dragon's Eye]...it's just here to draw people's attention." Ning shook his head. "It requires one to be a Keeper; clearly, one has to be completely loyal to the Grand Xia Dynasty. And it requires ten million karmic points...this would be incomparably difficult for even an Earth Immortal. Clearly, only truly powerful Fiendgod Body Refiners could possibly fulfill these requirements! But would a major power amongst the

Fiendgod Body Refiners sell his life into the service of the Grand Xia Dynasty, for the sake of a single divine ability?"

But of course, Ning also understood that this divine ability was definitely incomparably powerful. "Still, compared to my [Starseizing Hand], it's probably still a bit weaker," he mused to himself.

The [Starseizing Hand]...this was ranked amongst the top ten of the countless divine abilities that had been developed since Pangu had established the heavens. It wasn't too realistic for the Grand Xia Dynasty to acquire one of the top ten divine abilities.

.....

360 types of Immortal-ranked Ki Refining techniques. Three Pure Yang-ranked. 89 divine abilities. 61 divine will techniques. 102 forbidden techniques.

.....

There were also a number of other unique treasures as well as countless precious materials. Although they were only recorded in books, the requirements for acquiring them were all noted clearly...and since they were all mentioned, given the Raindragon Guard's resources, they would surely be able to produce them.

"Even Immortal-ranked magic treasures are available for trade. Immortal-ranked! I hear that even many Immortals lack treasures of that rank. Unfortunately, again, this requires one to be a Keeper, and one who has accumulated tremendous sums of karmic points."

.....

He continued to read about what was available. Even Ji Ning and Mu Northson, disciples of the Black-White College, the third most powerful organization in Stillwater Commandery, felt moved and desirous. One could imagine how ordinary new Raindragon Guards felt! All of them had itchy feelings in their hearts.

In terms of the Dao Repository...the Raindragon Guard truly was number one in the entire Grand Xia Dynasty!

“Everyone, what have you decided upon?” As Ning and the others walked out, Daoist Yulan, seeing the unhappy looks on their faces, said to them, “If you join the Keepers, then you will instantly soar to the heavens.”

Ning and the rest were all quiet.

“I’m not in a rush.”

“You can request to be admitted to join the Keepers at any time.” Adept Yulan shook her head and said, “However, the later you join the Keepers of the Raindragon Guard, the more training time you waste. Perhaps, because of the time you wasted, you won’t be able to ascend to the highest levels of your Immortal path.”

Suddenly, a short, pudgy man strode out from the group. A fierce look in his eyes, he said in a low voice, “I will join the Keepers.”

Daoist Yulan instantly laughed, her smile as beautiful as a flower’s. “Excellent. You are the first of this batch!”

Chapter 3: Seclusion Within the Black-White College

To choose to roam the world, carefree? Or to give that up in exchange for the chance to acquire truly top-tier techniques and arts? Which was the better choice? Since ancient days, there had never been a clear answer. As for Ji Ning, since he had access to the divine abilities, secret arts, and techniques of the Black-White College, he naturally wasn't too moved.

"The Grand Xia Dynasty has really used all means available to lure the Raindragon Guards to become Keepers." Ning sighed to himself. "Most importantly of all, the Dynasty never forces anyone; it's up to everyone's own decision! If you join the Keepers, you have no one to blame but yourself. What a superb move!"

"Everyone." Daoist Yulan's voice rang out once more. "After having become Raindragon Guards, your tribes will be blessed as well. Within the territory of your tribes and clans, you can carve out a territory of ten thousand square kilometers. So long as you are alive, this territory will be protected by the Raindragon Guard! There will definitely be no one who will dare to invade it! This includes the Marquis of Stillwater!"

Ning chuckled. Years ago, when he was young and encountered Adept Mu Xiao, the Adept had said the same thing to him.

"Even if you do die, this land will still be protected for a thousand years." Daoist Yulan suddenly laughed, as beautifully as a blooming flower. "But if you become Keepers, even if you die, your territory will still be protected for ten thousand years!"

"Ten thousand years?" Ning was surprised. "Ten thousand years is enough time for the clan to produce some truly powerful figures, if it focuses on doing so. Ten thousand years of peace?" This hadn't been recorded in any of the books. Aside from a few people who already knew about this, most of the new Raindragon Guards were still incomparably stunned.

"If you wish to join the Keepers, you may do so at any time." Daoist Yulan turned and walked away. While doing so, she said, "Let's go. Let's go mark out the territory of your clans." They walked to an ancient hall, where each of the new Raindragon Guards marked out their territories.

"Ji clan. City of Ten Thousand Swords." Pen in hand, Ning lightly circled around an area on the map, encompassing an area of ten thousand square kilometers around the City of Ten Thousand Swords, with all of the four prefecture cities just barely included within as well.

The old man in front of the table nodded. Accepting the leather map from Ning, he rolled it back up, then gave Ning a talisman. He said, "Take this and have someone who is at least at the Zifu level bind it, then hang it at the gates of the City of Ten Thousand Swords." Ning accepted it, then immediately left.

One person after another entered, mapping out their chosen territory. Some lone practitioners belonged to no clans, and so for now, they chose not to draw.

"If you wish to join the Keepers, you can do so at any time." A lotus flower leaf appeared beneath her feet, then lifted her up into the air. Her voice resonated through the skies as she said, "Now, you can each go do whatever you please. However, remember one thing; you are now one-clawed Raindragon Guards. Every ten years, you must complete a mission for at least one karmic point. This is your responsibility as Raindragon Guards. If you aren't able to complete this...you'll be apprehended and forced to carry out a mission. If you aren't able to carry it out, then you'll be expelled."

Her voice echoed in the air. As for Daoist Yulan herself, standing atop that lotus leaf, she gracefully soared into the clouds, disappearing into the mountains.

"Senior apprentice-brother, what should we do now?" Northson asked. Ning replied, "What can we do?" He shook his head. "Although this division of the Raindragon Guard has a plentiful Dao Repository, one has to use karmic points to trade for them. We don't have any karmic points

at all...we need to hurry up and go accept some missions. After doing so, the Raindragon Guard won't bother us. Let's go accept the mission, then go back to Stillwater City and sell off the items we acquired in the wild marshes."

Northson laughed. "Alright."

"Let's go." The little azure serpent was wrapped around Ning's wrist, and the large white dog was behind his back. By his side was his junior apprentice-brother, Northson. The two of them went off to accept missions, and then...

"Back to Stillwater City!"

Ning, Northson, the Whitewater Hound, and Qingqing were seated atop the dragon-headed warship. They quickly soared into the skies and into the clouds. "Senior apprentice-brother, this mission isn't so hard," Northson said. "Honestly, we should've taken on twenty or thirty karmic point missions. When the two of us join forces...it really will be hard to find a Wanxiang Adept who is a match for us!"

"Be a bit humbler," Ning said with a smirk. "If we encounter the likes of senior apprentice-brothers Bloodshadow, Holyfire, or Sloppy...will we be able to overcome them?"

"They, uh, they..." Northson mouth opened and closed a few times. Honestly; they really wouldn't be able to. These were figures who had comprehended a complete Dao Path and who were definitely comparable to Primal Daoists.

Ning said, "Don't think that just because we killed a few Wanxiang Adepts and Wanxiang Diremonsters that we are invincible. In addition, we've already taken on two 'ten karmic point' missions. As long as we can accomplish them, for the next century, we'll be completely free."

"True. A hundred years of freedom is good enough." Northson nodded, then gritted his teeth. "Before going to the military missions headquarters, I really had no idea that this region had so many vile figures present. There really are all sorts of vile men here."

"Right." A hint of a killing intent appeared in Ning's eyes as well. The military missions headquarters had many missions, the vast majority of which entailed killing some individuals who had committed extremely grave sins. These sins had reached the point of causing the Dao of the Heavens to cause sins to swirl about these sinners. By killing them, the entire Grand Xia Dynasty's fortunes would improve. Naturally, the Dynasty would set up long-lasting mechanisms for ensuring this happened.

"These two...one massacred countless mortals in order to train his 'Demonic Bloodhell Eye'. The other was actually able to cultivate a 'Ghostfetus King'...I really don't know how many infants he killed." Northson shook his head. "In addition, these are just missions of ten karmic points. Those missions for tens or hundreds of thousands of karmic points...they require that one go kill some truly evil, terrifying, demonic figures which cause headaches to even the Grand Xia Dynasty itself. Despite being surrounded by countless sins, they are still capable of withstanding the Three Calamities and Nine Tribulations."

When one embarked on the proper path, one had to be able to comprehend the Dao, had to refine one's Dao-heart, and move one step at a time. On the deviant paths, however, things moved much faster. Although they caused sins to swirl around a person, making the Three Calamities and Nine Tribulations to grow even more powerful...these deviant, evil paths could also allow for one's power to skyrocket, which would actually make resisting the calamities and tribulations much easier.

However, in the end, although the evil paths could allow you to grow temporarily more powerful, they were never long-lasting! When the time came for the Celestial Tribulation, those who walked the righteous, orthodox path had a chance to become Celestial Immortals; even if they failed, they would become Loose Immortals. However, it was virtually impossible for those on the vile, deviant paths to become Celestial Immortals, and extremely few of them would even be able to become Loose Immortals. This was because the Celestial Tribulation for

practitioners of the vile arts was simply too terrifying!

"We reached Stillwater City." Northson glanced downwards.

"Little Qing." Ning glanced at the little azure snake on his wrist. "Your ancient glacial ice...give me half of it."

Whoosh.

The little azure snake instantly transformed into mist, then reformed into an azure-robed maiden. Her eyes were completely round, and she said furiously, "That's mine, Master! I worked extremely hard to acquire it! You...you...you damn bandit, I completely misjudged you! That pure, innocent youth of the past has actually become so vicious. You truly have no..."

"Shut your mouth," Ning hurriedly barked. He took a deep breath, then said, "You damn miser, you can't possibly use up such an enormous piece of ancient glacial ice. I'm going to help you sell it at the Heavenly Treasures Mountain in exchange for liquefied elemental essence, so as to help you increase in power. Understood?"

Qingqing blinked, then mumbled, "You better not skim any of it."

"...come with me and watch as I trade it for liquefied elemental essence. Is that acceptable?" Ning was truly speechless. Little Qing was simply too miserly.

"Fine. Here you go." Qingqing stretched her hand out. Whoosh. A chunk of ancient glacial ice the size of a small mountain instantly appeared in front of her hand.

The nearby Northson's mouth immediately hung open. He howled, "You little green snake, you had so much ancient glacial ice, but you only gave me such a tiny piece?! And to think I was so grateful towards you!!!"

Qingqing didn't even give the bellowing Northson a single glance. With a wave of her hand, she sent her elemental ki out, slicing through the iceberg of ancient glacial ice, dividing it in two. She then stored half of it, giving the other half to Ning.

“Let’s go to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain.”

The dragon-headed warship charged downwards, towards that enormous, ancient city of Stillwater.

After returning to Stillwater City, Ning and Northson felt an instant sense of familiarity and nostalgia; they had lived here for more than three years, after all. After being inside the Heavenly Treasures Mountain for an hour, Ning’s group re-emerged.

“Yours.” Ning handed a jade bottle to the nearby Qingqing. Qingqing accepted the bottle, carefully inspecting its contents. There was exactly 2650 kilograms of liquefied elemental essence within; this was the exact amount which Ning had acquired when selling off the ancient glacial ice. Only now did she nod, satisfied.

Ning shook his head and laughed. Then he turned to Uncle White. “Uncle White, this is for you.” When Ning looked at the human-formed white-robed, white-haired Uncle White, who looked so similar to Ning’s own father, he felt all the more warm and loving towards him.

The Whitewater Hound walked over. After doing an inspection, he was shocked; there was 4000 kilograms of liquefied elemental essence within this bottle. He shook his head and sent mentally, “Ning, son, this amount of liquefied elemental essence would raise your power dramatically. There’s no need to waste it on me.”

“I have another 3000 kilograms here,” Ning sent back to him. “To me, an extra four thousand kilograms won’t have much of an impact. I’ll probably need tens of thousands of kilograms to reach the Primal Daoist stage. In addition, according to the traditions of the Black-White College, I must completely comprehend an entire Dao Path before I am permitted to enter the Primal Daoist stage. I’m still quite far away from being able to comprehend an entire Dao Path.”

“This isn’t of great use to me, but to you, Uncle White, it will be very helpful. Right now, Little Qing is a Wanxiang Diremonster. When you increase your power, Uncle White, you’ll be able to better assist me,” Ning sent mentally. The Whitewater Hound hesitated, but in the end, he

nodded.

During this trip to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain, Ning sold off almost all of the treasures he had acquired in the wild marshes of the Gaol Mountains, including Dong One's protective treasure, as well as the treasures of the Dragonwhale King. He even sold off the Dragonwhale King's intrinsic magic treasures for a high price; the intrinsic magic treasures of a Primal Dragonwhale Diremonster, those two dragon-whiskers, were far more valuable than ordinary Heaven-ranked magic treasures.

Ning and Northson had each acquired five thousand kilograms of liquefied elemental essence. Northson purchased quite a few construct ingredients, while Ning only had a bottle of 'firelotus pith', which was necessary for nourishing his goldflame earthfire.

"Let's go back to the Black-White College. Training back in the College will be very safe; we won't have to worry about being disturbed," Ning said.

"Right. What we need to do is go into secluded meditation and get it all done at one go. I should be able to train directly to the peak of the Wanxiang level," Northson said excitedly. "Senior apprentice-brother, you should be able to reach the peak of the Wanxiang level as well, right?" He had no idea that Ning had given four thousand kilograms to his Uncle White; he thought that Ning still had five thousand kilograms.

Ning laughed, then said, "Let's go. Let's go back and do some training."

Immediately, the two men and the two spirit-beasts began to walk towards the Black-White College.

Chapter 4: Disappointed and Confused

The black-robed, black-haired Immortal Diancai was seated in the lotus position atop his jade bed. Suddenly, a hint of amusement appeared at the corner of his lips. “Seems as though this kid was successful in joining the Raindragon Guard. He came back quite quickly.”

At this moment, Ji Ning and Mu Northson had just re-entered the Black-White College, flying through the air.

“Senior apprentice-brother, I’ll go find you tomorrow,” Northson said. “Go back and focus on your training,” Ning said. “After you finish, we’ll go take on more missions.” The two of them had prepared well in advance; after absorbing enough liquefied elemental essence and rising in power sufficiently, they would immediately go and execute those vile, sin-laden cultivators.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Ning moved forward on a small boat, while Northson rode his dragon-headed warship. Each flew to their own little mountains.

In midair.

“Ah, senior apprentice-brother Darknorth.”

“Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth returned? Last time, when I went to visit you, I discovered that you had gone out to go adventuring.”

On the way back to Darknorth Peak, Ning ran into six ordinary retainer-disciples and a single formal disciple.

“There’s Darknorth Peak.” Atop his flying ship, Ning stared downwards towards a mountain peak. It was already sundown, and beneath the glow of the setting sun, Darknorth Peak seemed so dreamlike and illusory. “Little Qing, you are my spirit-beast, but in the Black-White College, there are many forbidden areas which you cannot enter without permission. Today, just be good and quietly train in a secluded room. Don’t go anywhere else and don’t make trouble for me, understood?”

“Don’t worry, Master.” After entering the Black-White College, Qingqing was extraordinarily excited. Ning couldn’t help but laugh, and

then he immediately sent his ship flying downwards.

One figure after another emerged from the Darknorth Peak's estate; it was the six retainers Ning had left behind. Meng Roch, Cloudship, Cloudjade, Forgard, Weifang, and Nethersun.

"Senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning," the six called out, welcoming him in unison.

"Senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, you came back already? Were you successful in joining the Raindragon Guard?" Cloudjade looked at Ning, her eyes shining brightly. As a naturally beautiful, alluring maiden, she naturally attracted admirers like moths to the flame. She had many pursuers, and even amongst Ning's retainers, aside from Meng Roch and her elder brother Cloudship, the other three were all trying to woo her. Naturally, there were other retainers on other mountains who were chasing after as well.

Unfortunately...

After having grown accustomed to the retainers, when she saw Ning, she instantly mused to herself, "Compared to senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, all of them are like clay pigeons or earthen dogs! Hmph...even if the Dao-Companion of myself, Cloudjade, isn't as good as senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, he should be at least half as good as him. These people aren't even close to being comparable to him."

"Right. I joined the Raindragon Guard," Ning said with a smile. The six all said in unison, "Congratulations, senior apprentice-brother!"

Ning nodded, then pointed towards the azure-robed maiden by his side. "This is my spirit-beast, Qingqing. You should get to know each other."

"Senior apprentice-sister Qingqing." Everyone, Cloudjade included, spoke with great respect, because they could sense the powerful, monstrous aura emanating from her. She was definitely a Wanxiang-level Diremonster, while the six of them were all merely Zifu Disciples. In truth, Qingqing had released her aura intentionally, wanting to overawe them.

“Alright, all of you can leave now. Uncle White, arrange a private training room for Qingqing,” Ning said, then went by himself to his own training room.

“As soon as he comes back, he goes into training. No wonder he’s so talented.” Cloudjade looked at Ning, then nodded. “The Dao-Companion I find in the future must be as hard-working as senior apprentice-brother.”

Within the private training room. The ceilings glowed with light from the star-like jewels, which bathed the entire room in their glow. Ning sat there quietly in the lotus position, atop the carved jade bed in the center of the room.

“Let’s begin.” Ning waved his hand, and a jade bottle appeared. He placed it in front of himself, then opened the stopper. This jade flask had three thousand kilograms of liquefied elemental essence within, and as soon as he opened the stopper, a thick, nourishing elemental aura drifted out from with it. Just breathing in the air in this room made one feel extremely comfortable.

Ning’s soul was powerful, his talent was tremendous, and his foundation was very deep and stable. His training speed was also astonishingly fast. Normally, Wanxiang Adepts might spend centuries without building up enough elemental ki to break through to the Primal Daoist level, but for Ning, even if he just trained slowly, a few decades would be enough.

Despite that, however...these three thousand kilograms would be the equivalent of Ning engaging in painstaking training for six to ten years.

“Absorb.” Ning opened his mouth, and the liquefied elemental essence entered his mouth.

Within his Zifu region. At the deepest depths of that sea of elemental ki, the Watersource began to rapidly release large amounts of incomparably pure elemental ki. The entire elemental sea began to swivel slightly, and the surface of the sea naturally began to rise. At the same time, countless grains of refined essence began to emerge within the sea of elemental ki.

Rumble...these countless grains of refined essence rose into the skies. In the skies of the Zifu Region, there were thousands of stars, a sun, and a moon. These incomparably mysterious and profound stellar bodies were beginning to slowly move as well, and as they did, the truly pure 'Wanxiang-level elemental ki' began to be generated.

Rumble...the countless grains of refined essence were instantly swept into the orbits of these stellar bodies as they soared into the skies. The countless stellar bodies slowly moved about, grinding the grains and breaking them apart, then absorbing the remains. Naturally, it was the sun and the moon which absorbed the most.

Not seeming tired at all, the stellar bodies moved nonstop, each one exerting their own attractive or repulsive forces. Suddenly, the gravitational forces locked, and they were now unable to move an inch! These locked in stellar bodies continued to absorb more and more grains of refined essence. Upon reaching a certain size, they would undergo a qualitative transformation.

Bang!

The Wanxiang-level elemental ki from these stars was now clearly much more pure than before!

"The middle-stage of the Wanxiang-level," Ning mused to himself. "After using up nearly a thousand kilograms, I've reached the middle of the Wanxiang-level. Let's continue!"

A long period of time later.

This time, Ning used up more than 1500 kilograms, and the countless stars within Ning's Zifu region began to undergo yet another qualitative transformation.

"The late Wanxiang-level!" Ning opened his eyes, staring at the jade bottle before him. The jade bottle had less than five hundred kilograms left, but there was no way he could reach the peak with this amount. Based on his previous experiences, from the late Wanxiang-level to the peak Wanxiang-level would probably require 2000 to 2500 kilograms of liquefied elemental essence!

“Actually, the hardest part is still going to be going from the peak of the Wanxiang stage to the Primal Daoist stage. That step will take tens of thousands of kilograms,” Ning sighed.

Could it be that Ning would go and ambush and kill other Wanxiang Daoists?

As the saying goes, if one always walks by the side of the river, eventually, one’s shoes would get wet. Perhaps Ning would encounter a low-profile yet incredibly powerful Wanxiang Adept, or one with a tremendously powerful magic treasure. In that case, he truly would die! Thus, generally speaking, unless there were special circumstances, one wouldn’t go waylay and kill other Immortal cultivators. If one did so repeatedly, one might be successful for a time, but sooner or later, one would be finished.

“No rush. For now, in terms of both comprehension as well as in the Dao of the Sword, I’m not good enough yet. Breaking through to the Primal stage won’t be for some time to come.” Ning once more began to ponder on his swordplay and began to meditate.

Time flowed past, and soon, it was light outside. It was dawn, and Northson had come.

“Senior apprentice-brother, senior apprentice-brother,” Northson called out, appearing to be in uncommonly high spirits. ‘I went all the way to the peak of the Wanxiang stage, and still have quite a bit of liquefied elemental essence left.’

“Why so smug? I’m at the peak of the Wanxiang level as well!” Qingqing stared at him. Northson was shocked. “You? With just that little bit of liquefied elemental essence? Previously, you were like me, at the middle of the Wanxiang level; I used up far more liquefied elemental essence than you.”

Qingqing pursed her lips. “I spent three hundred kilograms to reach the late Wanxiang stage, then another 2250 to reach the peak of the Wanxiang stage. Clearly, previously I was already quite close to the late Wanxiang stage and was much stronger than you.”

Ning sat there to the side, sipping on some wine and laughing while the two bickered.

“Senior apprentice-brother, how about you?” Northson sat down as well. “Late Wanxiang level,” Ning said with a calm laugh.

“Late?” Northson was shocked. “Why only late?”

“My son Ning and I are both at the late Wanxiang stage now.” A white-haired, white-robed man walked in through the gate. Northson, upon hearing this, instantly understood. Ning must have given his liquefied elemental essence to the Whitewater Hound, who had previously only been at the peak of the Zifu level. Otherwise, how could the hound have trained all the way to the late Wanxiang stage at one go?

“Uncle White had an extremely high level of comprehension with regards to the Dao of formations. Thus, with enough liquefied elemental essence, he was able to advance considerably. If one doesn’t have a sufficiently high level of comprehension and a strong enough Dao-heart, even if one has liquefied elemental essence, it won’t make a difference.” Ning looked at Northson. “Junior apprentice-brother, are you going to go visit your master? If you don’t, we’ll head out right now.”

“No,” Northson said, shaking his head. “You didn’t go visit your master either, right?” Ning nodded. They had just said their farewells last time...it had only been three months. Ning hadn’t improved that much in terms of swordplay, and so he didn’t need to be in a rush to see his master.

“Let’s eat breakfast, then head out,” Ning said. “All of you, sit down. Uncle White, Little Qing, sit.” Northson, Qingqing, Uncle White, and Ning all sat there, chatting, laughing, and eating. That very day, after the sun fully rose, Ning’s group once more left the Black-White College...and after this departure, it would be a long time before they returned.

Ning had encountered quite a few people after returning to the Black-White College, and so those who were interested in him naturally learned quite quickly that he was back.

“Whoosh.” Ninelotus waved her hand, and a watery mirror appeared in front of her. She stared at herself in front of the mirror.

“Eh?” Ninelotus frowned slightly. The style of her blue robes began to change, and even the embroidery of the robes began to change. As a set of magic robes, it naturally could change in coloration. A short time later, Ninelotus finally smiled. With a wave of her hand, she dismissed the watery mirror in front of her.

Whoosh. A snowy white lotus flower appeared. Ninelotus stepped onto the snowy white lotus flower, then flew straight into the air, leaving her estate.

A short while later. Ninelotus, aboard the snowy white lotus flower, saw the distant Darknorth Peak. After flying a bit closer, she finally spoke out: “I heard that junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning has returned. I wonder if we can meet?” Her voice echoed in the air above Darknorth Peak.

Soon, a swarthy, black-skinned man and an alluring woman appeared. It was Meng Roch and Cloudjade. Roch hurriedly bowed. “Senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus, senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning returned yesterday, but he left again this morning.” The nearby Cloudjade stared up at Ninelotus, who stood upon her snowy white lotus flower. She felt as though Ninelotus were a beautiful, Immortal fairy, and she couldn’t help but feel envious.

“He’s gone?” Ninelotus was stunned. “When will he be back?” She asked.

“We don’t know.” Roch shook his head. “Senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning said that this time, he probably wouldn’t be back for a long time.”

“A long time?”

Ninelotus nodded slowly, a hint of disappointment in her eyes. And then, still atop her magic treasure, she departed, disappearing into the distant horizons.

Chapter 5: Never Forget

Ji Ning didn't know that Ninelotus had come to his place shortly after his departure. At this moment in time, he was on a journey with his junior apprentice-brother, Uncle White, and Qingqing to go apprehend some criminals.

Thanks to the intelligence reports provided by the Raindragon Guard, after roughly a month or so wandering through various regions, Ning's group finally arrived at the location where an evil cultivator known as Adept Blackhorn was hiding. This Adept Blackhorn relied on a 'Ghostfetus King' to do battle, and no one had ever been able to overcome him.

Unfortunately, this time, he encountered Ning's group.

First, Uncle White stealthily set down a formation, making it so that Adept Blackhorn had nowhere to run. Next, Ning's group revealed themselves. Ning didn't even fight; he let Mu Northson reveal his 'Fiendish Skyeater Serpents' and use his constructs to grind the Ghostfetus King to death. Without the protection of the Ghostfetus King, Adept Blackhorn was instantly thrown into a state of terror and was effortless killed.

"Junior apprentice-brother, your power has clearly increased," Ning praised. "You were able to kill the infamous Adept Blackhorn with such ease."

"Heh heh." Northson scratched his head. "I'm at the peak of the Wanxiang level, after all, and my Fiendish Skyeater Serpents were upgraded considerably after I acquired quite a few materials at the Heavenly Treasures Mountain. Naturally, their power has increased substantially."

Ning understood. The Dao of Constructs...it required significant amounts of resources and precious items. "Let's go. Let's go take down the next criminal," Ning said.

"With us four Wanxiang Adepts working together, taking down this

type of criminal is truly effortless.” The nearby Qingqing was quite smug as well. As for the Whitewater Hound, he just stood there quietly, smiling.

Swoosh! The dragon-headed warship once more soared into the skies, and Ning’s group once more embarked on a journey. They would go after the next criminal – Adept Qiandou!

No matter how well they had hidden themselves, they still couldn’t escape the eyes and ears of the Raindragon Guard. Unless, of course, they were like Ning, who could go hiding within his underwater estate. For everyone else, so long as they were in this major world which was controlled by the Grand Xia Dnasty, it would be impossible for them to escape the assault of the Raindragon Guard.

“Adept Qiandou really did hide quite far away. This place is three million kilometers away from Stillwater City, and can be considered one of the most distant backwaters of the entire Stillwater Commandery. If he were to flee any further, he would have left the entire Commandery.

“If he left Stillwater Commandery, then it wouldn’t be for our division of the Raindragon Guard to pursue him.”

Ning’s group was chatting amongst themselves at the Crimson Dragon Mountains’ teleportation array. Whoosh! Within Dongyu City, three million kilometers away, a teleportation array that was more than three hundred meters high suddenly lit up. Ning, Northson, and the others all appeared within it.

“Greetings, milord Raindragon Guards.” An old man nearby bowed respectfully. There were six Zifu Disciples and a group of Xiantian experts present as well, and they all were incomparably respectful. Ning swept them with a glance.

Dongyu City was a commandery city where the Grand Xia Dynasty had armies stationed, much like Swallow Mountain City. The only difference was that within this commandery city was a small teleportation array of the Raindragon Guard! The wild marshes of the Gaol Mountains was a major danger zone and thus it had Primal Daoists and Loose Immortals on guard, but Dongyu City was an extremely ordinary location, and so it

only had Zifu Disciples present.

“Mmm.” Ning nodded. “Junior apprentice-brother, let’s go.” Ning didn’t chat with these people; he immediately boarded the dragon-headed warship and soared into the skies. Based on the latest intelligence reports from the Raindragon Guard, Adept Qiandou was within an ancient mountain range that was located a few tens of thousands of kilometers outside of Dongyu City.

Ning’s group searched carefully for him. Soon, it was night. “There he is.” Ning, standing atop the warship in the night sky, had been spreading his divine sense throughout the ground below, to a distance of three hundred kilometers. He suddenly found that within this mountain, there was a truly ferociously guarded city. This city was apparently protected by a vision-impairing formation; one wouldn’t be able to locate it with the naked eye at all. Fortunately, Ning possessed the divine sense; otherwise, they would’ve spent months before being able to find it.

“What a city.” Ning’s eyes flashed with a killing intent. “Where is it?” Northson hurriedly asked. “Right below us,” Ning growled. “Let’s go. Follow me.”

Ning jumped down, and as he did, a sword flashed and appeared beneath his feet, tearing through the air as it flew downwards. The Whitewater Hound and Northson followed him down as well. While charging down...

“Break.” Ning pointed off into the distance, and a stream of water appeared out of nowhere. It swirled around a distant formation flag, then easily pulled it out. Instantly, the scenery for a region of around ten kilometers began to twist and change. The seemingly ordinary, wild mountains instantly disappeared, transforming into an enormous city that was filled with a large number of slaves. The slaves were all carrying out arduous manual labor, either carrying stones, building walls, or even cutting wood from the surrounding area in order to further reinforce this city.

“This is really...” Upon seeing this city appear out of nowhere, Northson

stared, speechless. “Utter wasteful extravagance,” Ning said coldly.

“He’s a cultivator of vile arts. It’s one thing for him to massacre commoners in order to complete his vile techniques, but why must he have them build this city for him? And why must he squeeze them so?” Northson was immediately able to see that these commoners were under such great duress while building the city that many were literally worked to death.

Ning didn’t say a single word. Because his divine sense covered the entire city, he could easily sense the despair, agony, pain, and numbness of the countless people within it! This was a sort of numbness that came from completely and utter despair. In addition, a number of these commoners held a boundless amount of resentment in their hearts. Their hatred so was so strong that Ning’s divine sense could easily sense it.

“This is hell!” Ning suddenly charged into the skies, transforming into a streak of light and moving to stand in the air directly above this city of doom. An enormous Waterflame Lotus swirled around Ning.

The light of the Waterflame Lotus was incomparably eyecatching in the night sky. Instantly, the countless commoners who were engaged in crushing physical night labor all raised their heads. They saw the enormous Waterflame Lotus in the air above them, and saw a seemingly small, frail form.

“Qiandou, you old demon, hurry up and come out to die!” Ning let out an explosive roar, which rang like thunder and echoed throughout this entire city.

“Ah?!”

Boom

BOOM!

The many, incomparably savage and bloodthirsty Xiantian experts who were in charge of overseeing this city all began to howl in agony. Blood poured from each orifice, and they died on the spot. These were the disciples and grand-disciples of Adept Qiandou, and had supported him in

his evildoings.

Ning's divine sense was able to tell that these people were surrounded by the foul aura of sin as well. Ordinary people would neither be surrounded by the clear aura of positive karma or the foul aura of sin. The fact that they were surrounded by sin represented that their vileness had already reached an extremely high level. Against these sin-covered malefactors, Ning had used his [Soulshaker Art]; because the difference in power between them was too great, all of them died right away, blood flowing from their orifices!

"What?"

"How could that old fiend have...?"

Those commoner slaves stared in astonishment. Those terrifying Xiantian lifeforms, who had always appeared to be incomparably savage, all fell over, dead. The slaves simply couldn't believe it.

Right at this moment...

"Might I ask, which fellow Daoist has come!?" A white-robed, long-bearded man suddenly appeared in midair, locking gazes with the distant Ning. Ning stared at him, not the slightest bit worried that he would flee!

This was because, when he had charged out, Uncle White had already, secretly acted the grand spacelock formation.

"Qiandou, you old fiend, you have a few young fiends with you." Ning swept the distant palace with a glance. There were quite a few Zifu Disciples standing at the entrance to the palace; clearly, they were the disciples of this old demon.

"Dare I ask, who are you, fellow Daoist?" The old fiend, Qiandou, maintained a smile on his face. Ning, surrounded by the Waterflame Lotus, stared downwards towards the hellish landscape below, then said softly, "After you die and go to the Netherworld Kingdom, you will be tormented in the eighteenth level of the Netherworld. The torment suffered by these commoners you tortured to death will be repaid unto you thousands of times over."

“Die?” Adept Qiandou shook his head. “So long as I can become an Earth Immortal, when the time comes, I’ll send a hint of my truesoul into the Netherworld Kingdom. Given my prowess as an Immortal, I will willingly become a Ghost Immortal. Why should I fear torment?”

“Earth Immortal?” Ning stared at him coldly. “Wait to suffer in agony in the eighteenth level of the Netherworld. Given how many sins you have committed, I imagine that you won’t be able to endure for many years before you are tormented to the point of your soul collapsing.”

The amount of sin he had committed vastly surpassed Bei Zishan’s. Adept Qiandou’s body was not surrounded by a foul aura, but by a bloody light! An eye-piercing bloody light! A bloody light that caused one’s heart to quail! This amount of sin was utterly astonishing.

As soon as Ning’s words came out, Adept Qiandou roared in fury, “I think you’ll be the one to die instead!”

Whoosh. An enormous pupil of blood suddenly appeared above his head. This enormous bloody eye, filled with boundless sin and evil, stared directly towards Ning. And as it did so....boom! An incomparably powerful, bloody, baleful light shot straight towards Ning’s soul.

“An ant who wishes to shake a tree.” Within Ning’s mind appeared the divine visage of Maiden Nuwa. Nuwa stood there in midair, radiating an endless aura of light. As soon as the bloody aura touched it, it instantly melted away like snow in the face of the sun, transforming into nothingness.

“Not good.” Adept Qiandou’s face changed, and he hurriedly turned, meaning to flee. But right at this moment, Ning let out an icy roar. “DIE!”

His powerful divine sense swept out in an incomparably savage wave, crushing down upon Adept Qiandou’s soul. Adept Qiandou instantly felt dizzy and dazed. Ning pointed towards him with a single finger, and around Adept Qiandou’s body, a Waterflame Lotus appeared out of nowhere. Adept Qiandou was completely dazed and unable to fight back; as a result, as soon as the Waterflame Lotus began to swivel...he was instantly transformed into meat paste!

“What?!”

“Flee!”

Those five Zifu Disciples before the palace were incomparably terrified. The five of them had followed Adept Qiandou in doing countless evil deeds, and the tainted aura of sin had surrounded them long ago. Ning pointed to them from far away, and one Waterflame Lotus after another began to bloom, glowing with holy light as they crushed these five into meat paste.

All of them were taken care of at one go.

As for Northson and the Whitewater Hound, they flew over as well. They displayed no joy; as they stared down at the countless oppressed commoners, they couldn’t muster any joy at all. “How could he do such a thing?” Northson let out a sigh.

This opponent possessed the ‘Hellblood Demon Eye’, and was extremely hard to deal with. Ning had a powerful soul, and also possessed a divine will attack; he was the perfect counter to this person. Thus, they had planned all along for Ning to be the one to fight him alone.

“There is kindness in the world, but there naturally is evil as well,” Ning said calmly. “Senior apprentice-brother,” Northson looked at Ning, “Now that we’ve both completed our missions, what shall we do next?”

Ning was startled. Next? Instantly, three blood-soaked names suddenly emerged from the deepest recesses of Ning’s mind. Dong Seven! Yu Dong! Shui Yi! Ning had never forgotten these three names. These three names were like blazing irons that had been imprinted onto his very soul. The most important people in his life, his mother and father, had died... because of these three!

Suddenly, a surge of emotion filled Ning’s breast. Kill! Kill! Kill! When Ning unburied this matter from where it had lain deep within his heart, he became filled with hatred and a desire to kill. These three were the three he hated most in the world!

“Next...” Ning said softly, “I’ll get revenge!”

"Get revenge?" Northson was puzzled. "On who?"

"Those who slew my parents!" Ning said slowly. Hearing this, Northson's face instantly changed. Qingqing lowered her serpents head, pressing it against Ning's arm, as though to console Ning. As for the nearby Whitewater Hound, he just stared quietly at Ning, his eyes also filled with the same desire. After all...he had personally witnessed that nightmarish day.

"I cannot share the same heavens with those who slew my parents!" Ning said.

Chapter 6: A Surging Killing Intent

Although Ji Ning spoke very softly, Mu Northson and Qingqing could both sense the boundless hatred and killing intent within those words. This enmity had sunk deep into his soul, and had embedded itself within the marrow of his bones!

Ning could never forget it. When he had left Swallow Mountain, Ning had deeply desired to take revenge! However, at that point in time, he didn't know anything about the world; it was simply too vast and too alien. That was why he had decided to join a school and to first increase his own power, temporarily burying his hatred deep within his heart. Now that he had finished his training and joined the Raindragon Guard, it was time to take revenge!

"Father, Mother, Uncle," Ning murmured to himself silently, "Those three of them...your child will not spare a single one! Not a single one!"

"Junior apprentice-brother." Ning turned to look at the nearby Northson. "I am going to take revenge. It will be enough for me to bring along Qingqing and Uncle White. There's no need for you to go."

"Senior apprentice-brother, what the hell are you talking about?!" Northson said furiously, "I no longer have any kin in this world, now that my mother is dead! I have no attachments to anyone, so you don't need to worry about causing trouble for me. As your junior apprentice-brother, I know exactly how agonizing your pain is, with your parents having been killed. In the past, I personally slaughtered those evil villains and avenged my mother. This time, I will definitely go with you!"

Ning was stunned. His mother had died? He had taken revenge on behalf of his mother? He had no kin left in the world? His junior apprentice-brother had never told him this before.

"Fine!" Ning nodded, then gave Northson a gentle clap on the shoulders. "You are a good brother." Northson looked at Ning, who said, "Let's go. Let's go to Stillwater City."

Northson immediately said, "Stillwater City? Right...didn't you say you

wanted to get revenge? As I see it, although we've fulfilled two assignments already, for now, there's no need for us to go back to the Crimson Dragon Mountains to turn them in. For now, we can go act against your enemies while claiming we are on a mission to apprehend suspects on behalf of the Raindragon Guard. This gives us a good excuse."

Ning nodded. In the past, Xue Hongyi had used the excuse of 'suspecting that the Ji clan was harboring criminals' to investigate Ning himself. Fortunately, Northmont Baiwei had stopped him. At that time, Baiwei had the status of 'Emissary for the Marquisate of Stillwater'; if he hadn't, even he would've found it difficult to stop this matter!

"That's exactly what I was thinking," Ning said. "However, we still need to go to Stillwater City to make some preparations. First, I need to get the intelligence reports on my enemies. Second, I need to buy some magic treasures."

"Magic treasures?" Northson said, puzzled, "Can it be that your enemies are extremely powerful, senior apprentice-brother?" Ning shook his head. "No, they should only be Zifu Disciples. Even if they make a breakthrough, they'll only be ordinary Wanxiang Adepts."

"Then why must you buy treasures to deal with them, senior apprentice-brother?" Northson asked, puzzled. Ning said in a low, growling voice, "Because...I am going to shatter their souls!"

The cold malice in these words caused Northson, Qingqing, and the Whitewater Hound to all feel shocked. Northson thought back to how when he was a child, he had slaughtered those enemies...back then, he had been similarly crazed by hate. He could completely understand what Ning was currently feeling.

"Let's go," Ning said. "Alright." The group immediately boarded the dragon-headed warship, quickly departing and going to Stillwater City.

Stillwater City. Ning first paid a visit to his good friend, Baiwei. "I already know," Baiwei said, "That the most recent group of Raindragon Guard testees included you, Brother Ji Ning. And the name of your junior apprentice-brother, Mu Northson, as well." Baiwei looked towards Ning,

then smiled towards Northson as well. He saw that Ning was glancing towards the maidservants, and he waved his hand towards them. "You can leave," he said, and they all left.

"Brother Baiwei, I've come to ask you for some help," Ning said solemnly. "Please, speak," Baiwei said.

"I need intelligence reports for three people," Ning said. "Snowdragon Mountain's Dong Seven, Shui Yi, and Yu Dong! However, I don't wish for the Heavenly Treasures Mountain to know that I was the one investigating them."

Baiwei nodded lightly. "Understood. I'll immediately arrange for people to go to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain and do some investigations." "Sorry for the trouble," Ning said.

Killing the three of them wouldn't be hard. What made things difficult was Snowdragon Mountain. Shui Yi and Yu Dong had less impressive backgrounds, but Dong Seven was the grandson of a Primal Daoist of Snowdragon Mountain. Once Ning acted against him, no matter how secretly he acted, Snowdragon Mountain would still investigate...and if they discovered that someone had once investigated all three of these individuals, they would definitely grow suspicious. Thus, he had to leave as few clues behind as possible.

"I'll immediately send someone to go. In less than two hours, they'll be able to have the results," Baiwei said, rising to his feet. "The two of you can rest here. I'll make the arrangements."

.....

Just two hours later, a servant came in, carrying three thick tomes and giving them to Northmont Baiwei. "You can leave now," Baiwei instructed, and the servant quietly departed.

Baiwei handed the three reports directly to Ning. "These are the most detailed reports the Heavenly Treasures Mountain has regarding these three individuals. Reports are divided into multiple levels, but these are the highest level reports, and are the most detailed ones, which have all of their most secret details. However, the Heavenly Treasures Mountain is

just an intelligence network, not the heavens; they can't possibly know everything. For example, they have no idea that this time, it was you, Brother Ji Ning, who wanted these reports."

Ning nodded. Human resources were limited. No matter how formidable the Heavenly Treasures Mountain was, they couldn't know everything.

"Dong Seven." Ning began to flip through the book. The nearby Baiwei simply drank his wine, slowly savoring it, while Northson did the same. None of them spoke or did anything to disturb Ning.

Ning read quite quickly. This report was fairly detailed; it had records of many of the events Dong Seven had carried out since he was young. It had details on some of the problems he had caused Snowdragon Mountain, and even discussed some of the women he had raped. There were records of many events...but no records of his attack against Ning's parents and his uncle.

"The Heavenly Treasures Mountain isn't omniscient. Immortal cultivators will occasionally run into trouble while wandering the world. If they don't tell anyone, it really is quite hard to find out about it." Ning shook his head.

"This Dong Seven...he truly is a calamity." As Ning continued to read, he began to understand that Dong Seven was a child who had been spoiled rotten. Even now, he was still a mere peak Zifu Disciple.

Dong Seven came from the major 'Dong' clan. Because the Dong clan had a Primal Daoist amongst their ranks, Daoist Coldsun, they naturally were an extremely powerful clan. The Dong clan had quite a few talented figures, and the earlier Dong One had been the eldest and most talented member of Dong Seven's generation! But of course, Dong One had already been killed by the Dragonwhale King back in the wild marshes of the Gaol Mountains.

Daoist Coldsun previously had a single son, but his son had died while roaming the outside world. His son had left behind only one child as well; Dong Seven. Thus, Daoist Coldsun doted far too much on this sole grandson of his.

Although the likes of Dong One and the others of his generation would also be treated well, they naturally couldn't compare to Dong Seven. Thus, in the Dong clan, there were many who would flatter and fawn over Dong Seven, causing him to grow ever more arrogant and brash. His greatest hobby was to rape beautiful women, but only those with particularly refined auras.

Thus, he had caused countless calamities. However, due to his powerful background and strong supporters, nothing had ever come of it.

"What's this?" Ning frowned. "He actually lives on Snowdragon Mountain, along with Daoist Coldsun?" Dong Seven truly was coddled too much. Others found it quite difficult to even see a Primal Daoist in person, but he actually lived alongside his grandfather.

"If he lives on Snowdragon Mountain, there's nothing I can do." Ning shook his head. Although he was confident, he wasn't so crazed as to charge straight towards an ancient school that had existed for countless years. Even Loose Immortals would probably be hesitant; after all, that was the foundation of the entire school, and the various formations as well as suicide or self-destruct mechanisms there would be enough to threaten even them.

"Next one." Ning turned to Yu Dong's information. Yu Dong was a cultivator with tremendous ambition, and who was incredibly calculating. For the sake of acquiring enough resources, he willing served as Dong Seven's henchman! After getting what he wanted for Dong Seven, he had silently slipped away.

"He's now an early Wanxiang Adept, and he lives at Mount Mooncrescent with his master, a peak Wanxiang Adept." Yu Dong personally hadn't actually done too many vile deeds; the records of the Heavenly Treasures Mountain, at least, included only two matters. Naturally, what he had done to Ning's parents hadn't been included!

His master, Adept Mooncrescent, had actually done quite a few evil deeds. He was a sinister, despicable fellow who had reached the peak of the Wanxiang level more than two centuries ago, and was extremely

strong!

“Although he has a master, they are at Mount Mooncrecent?” Ning felt relaxed. “This is in a wild, desolate region; dealing against him won’t be too hard. Let’s look at the last one.”

Ning flipped to Shui Yi’s materials. Shui Yi...he was originally a servant of the Dong clan, but was an extremely outstanding one who had been viewed favorably by the Dong clan. By now, he had become a peak Wanxiang Adept as well, but because his potential was limited, he had left Snowdragon Mountain and had always lived within the Dong clan’s territory.

“The Dong clan’s territory?” Ning began to feel a headache coming. “This is a bit more troublesome. However...I’ll still be able to kill him.”

The Dong clan was the clan of Daoist Coldsun. Daoist Coldsun, however, stood guard over Snowdragon Mountain, and so there were no Primal Daoists protecting the Dong clan. It did have a group of Wanxiang Adepts, but clearly, the Dong clan wasn’t guarded nearly as tightly as Snowdragon Mountain was. Ning felt confident in being able to deal with them. After all, he only needed to kill Shui Yi, not annihilate the entire Dong clan.

“First kill Yu Dong, then kill Shui Yi. In the past, it was the two of them who actually fought against my uncle and my parents; they are the actual killers,” Ning mused to himself.

The nearby Baiwei could sense the hard, killing intent radiating from Ning, as well as the cold, ferocious light flashing through his eyes. Baiwei mused silently to himself, “My brother, Ji Ning, is normally an extremely amiable person, but he actually has such a fiendish side to him as well. This must be a deep enmity, and an extraordinary one at that.”

“Brother Baiwei.” Ning rose to his feet, and Baiwei hurriedly rose as well. “Sorry for troubling you, Brother Baiwei. You’ve helped me numerous times. I won’t waste words thanking you; I, Ji Ning, will remember everything you’ve done.” Ning clasped his hands. “I won’t stay any longer. I’ll leave now.”

"If there's anything further you need, Brother Ji Ning, please feel free to tell me," Baiwei said.

"Everything is as I expected." Ning clasped his hands again, then led his junior apprentice-brother and departed.

Two hours later. After the sun had set. Ning's group boarded the dragon-headed warship and flew into the skies, departing from Stillwater City.

"With this magic treasure, I will definitely ensure that you won't even have a chance to reincarnate!" Ning gripped a magic treasure that looked like an incense burner, then raised his head. "Junior apprentice-brother, let's go south. To Mount Mooncrescent!"

Chapter 7: The Real Yu Dong

Mount Mooncrescent. This place was considered holy grounds by everyone within the surrounding hundred thousand acres, but because there was a truly powerful Wanxiang Adept here, Adept Mooncrescent. And because of this, the nearby tribes and monsters didn't dare create any trouble!

Within a beautiful, lavish hall. An old man was seated atop a jade bed, radiating a cold, sinister aura. Above his hands, there floated a black, palm-sized scimitar.

"Master." A respectful voice rang out from outside. "Daddy." Another voice rang out as well. The sinister old man revealed a hint of a smile. "Come in."

A short, ugly looking man walked in, alongside a tall, azure-robed, beautiful woman. The ugly man appeared quite calm and collected.

"This Yu Dong..." The sinister old man looked at the ugly man, nodding mentally to himself. "When he first apprenticed himself to me, I didn't hold him in any regard, but unexpectedly, he was the first amongst my many disciples who reached the Wanxiang level! In addition, he made his breakthrough after a few short decades, which is quite fast. He really can't be underestimated."

As for his appearances? Immortal cultivators didn't care too much about appearances. If you were both weak and ugly, then others might look down on you, but if you were powerful...no matter how ugly you were, others would respect you.

"And, by the looks of it, it seems as though Wei'er has taken quite a fancy to Yu Dong as well." The sinister old man nodded to himself. "It seems as though in the end, my lineage will pass into the hands of Yu Dong."

"Wei, daughter, come over here," the sinister old man said. The azure-robed woman walked over, sitting atop the jade bed as well. She hugged the old man's arm in a very close manner. "Daddy, this time, senior

apprentice-brother Yu Dong has procured a gift for you. You'll definitely like it," Yue Wei said.

"Oh?" The sinister old man laughed as he looked over. Yu Dong immediately said with respect, "Master, your disciple just procured a bottle of 'Three Immortals' wine, and so came to offer it to you."

"Three Immortals wine?" The sinister old man's eyes instantly lit up, and he couldn't help but sniff the air. He had been stuck at the peak Wanxiang level for more than two centuries, and was close to the end of his lifespan; he didn't have much longer to live. For cultivators who were close to the end of their lives, they cared deeply about being able to enjoy themselves.

Three Immortals wine was a truly top-class wine that was incredibly hard to find. Generally speaking, it was only available in places like Stillwater City, while hard to procure in backwater places like Mount Mooncrescent.

"You are quite thoughtful." The sinister old man nodded in approval. He felt more and more satisfied with this Yu Dong. Despite having reached the Wanxiang level, Yu Dong had remained under his tutelage, and remained as respectful as ever. In addition, he served as respectfully as he would towards his own father...

"Master, you showed me great kindness by transmitting knowledge unto me. What's a little wine?" Yu Dong produced a jade tray, atop which was a bottle of Immortal wine. That incomparably beautiful and intricately carved jade wine-bottle alone would be considered a priceless treasure in the mortal world.

"Junior apprentice-sister, if you would be so kind." Some time later, Yu Dong and his junior apprentice-sister, Yue Wei, both left the hall.

The sinister old man watched his most capable disciple and his beloved daughter walk off into the distance. He couldn't help but nod, especially upon seeing how respectfully Yu Dong treated his daughter.

Within another hall on Mount Mooncrescent. This was Yu Dong's estate. This area was naturally warded by formations, preventing

outsiders from entering.

“You can leave,” Yu Dong instructed his servants upon entering his estate. “Yes.” The servants and maids all respectfully departed, going to other halls within this estate, leaving behind only himself and his junior apprentice-sister, Yue Wei.

After seating himself in the hall, Yu Dong glanced at Yue Wei, then said calmly, “Kneel.”

Yue Wei immediately laughed enticingly, her robes immediately disappearing from her body, revealing her ravishingly beautiful body. She lightly knelt down, then, like a little dog, slowly crawled forward. And then, moving close towards to Yu Dong’s legs, she began to lick.

“In the past, you held me in such disregard. But now, you are kneeling between my legs.” Yu Dong looked downwards towards Yue Wei as he would towards a dog.

“Senior apprentice-brother, stop teasing me,” Yue Wei said with an adorable harrumph. Yu Dong stretched his hand out, grabbing her head and pushing it down hard. Instantly, Yue Wei began to cough and choke.

“Hahaha...” Yu Dong laughed wildly. “Endure it.” Yue Wei had no choice but to do so.

Later the next morning...

“Mm.” After having thoroughly enjoyed himself, Yu Dong sat there, pondering. As for Yue Wei, she sat on his lap. “Junior apprentice-sister, that old bastard...when will he transmit the Mooncrescent Saber Formation to me? I’ve served him a long, long time after I became a Wanxiang Adept, and yet he still hasn’t taught it to me!”

Yue Wei said gently, “Don’t worry, senior apprentice-brother. I mentioned this to father before, but at that time, my father was hesitant. By the looks of it, father is beginning to like you more and more. I’ll mention it again later. I’ll definitely succeed.”

“I hope that old bastard doesn’t die and take that saber formation to the Netherworld Kingdom with him.” A cold light was in Yu Dong’s eyes.

“Don’t worry,” Yue Wei said hurriedly, and Yu Dong nodded slightly. He continued to ponder silently, while the nearby Yue Wei didn’t dare to disturb him.

“Three years. At most, I’ll wait three more years for that old bastard. I can’t keep wasting my time like this,” Yu Dong said broodingly while looking at Yue Wei. “Half a month from now, I’ll go ask the old bastard to teach me his saber formation; after that, you go help me speak to him as well.”

“Alright.” Yue Wei nodded obediently. Yu Dong suddenly began to laugh strangely. “Junior apprentice-sister, if your daddy saw you right now, would he die of anger? Hahaha...hahahahaha...”

His evil, wicked laughter was completely different from his normal, honest attitude. All of the servants in the estate had been instructed to leave, and the protective formations had been activated; there was no way any sound would leave the room, and there was no way to scry inside from the outside world. Thus, Yu Dong didn’t need to disguise himself at all.

When he was young, he had understood quite early on that this was a world where the weak would be devoured by the strong. Thus, he had clawed up, step by step, either slaughtering or flattering until he had grown powerful enough to fear no one. However, he had always been very good at hiding his nature. Those who knew what his true nature was like were either dead or under his complete control.

Even Ji Ning’s intelligence report had been unable to see through Yu Dong’s façade. After all...the Heavenly Treasures Mountain wouldn’t expend too many resources on a minor figure like him.

“The Mooncrescent Saber Formation that old bastard possesses was left behind by a deceased Loose Immortal. Not even Snowdragon Mountain has such a powerful formation.” In the past, Yu Dong didn’t have any other options, which was why he had apprenticed himself to Adept Mooncrescent. However, based on some tools he had, as well as his many years of service, he had discovered some of Adept Mooncrescent’s secrets. Thus, he worked ever more diligently.

"If I still cannot acquire it...then I'll kill him." A cold light flashed through Yu Dong's eyes. He had originally been an ordinary mortal, and had clawed his way to his current position. Naturally, he was an incredibly calculating person, and he had caused the deaths of many. In the past, he had caused the deaths of two young masters of his clan, three elders of his clan, and even two genius disciples of Snowdragon Mountain. However, to this very day, no one knew that it had been him.

That young master 'Dong Seven' of the Dong clan was nothing more than a chess piece to him.

.....

A dragon-headed warship was in the air above Mount Mooncrescent. Ning stared downwards. "Senior apprentice-brother, aren't you going to attack?" Northson was puzzled. He could sense that Ning was filled with a powerful killing intent, but upon reaching Mount Mooncrescent, they had actually come to a halt.

"Not just yet." Ning stared downwards. His divine sense had already been spread out, covering the entire Mount Mooncrescent. He could see everything going on within it. In front of Adept Mooncrescent, Yu Dong had acted one way, but upon returning to his own hall...he had acted in a completely different manner.

"This Yu Dong seems to be quite an extraordinary fellow," Ning mused to himself. His divine sense hadn't been able to find a single flaw in Yu Dong's façade before Adept Mooncrescent. If this person had become friends with Ning, most likely even Ning would have been fooled into trusting him; he was definitely a very steady, sure-footed person.

"He was able to start as an ordinary mortal and reach this current level..." Ning thought back to the history of Yu Dong as mentioned in the intelligence reports, then silently mused to himself, "I imagine it wasn't as simple as the reports described. The reports made it seem as though everything had been smooth sailing for Yu Dong, and that he had flattered and fawned over many as he eventually reached his current heights. I thought that he was just talented and lucky, but now, it seems

that he is quite the ambitious figure.”

“However! Even if you are an ambitious, ruthless, formidable figure, today you shall definitely die!” A cold light flashed through Ning’s eyes. In the world of Immortal cultivators, personal power was more important than games of intrigue. For example, with his divine sense, Ning was able to clearly see each of Yu Dong’s actions, and so Yu Dong’s hidden, true face was instantly discovered by Ning.

“Let’s go,” Ning said, pointing towards the distant estate. “Let’s go to Yu Dong’s estate.” “Alright,” Northson immediately said.

The Whitewater Hound, now in human form, also stared towards the distant estate. His eyes were also filled with killing intent; after all, he had personally experienced the events of that year.

Swoosh! The dragon-headed warship surged downwards towards the ground.

“Uncle White. Set up the spacialock formation,” Ning sent mentally. “Alright.” The Whitewater Hound nodded, then silently slipped out of the ship, beginning to stealthily set down spacialock formation flags in the area around Mount Mooncrescent. The grand spacialock formation was able to take up a hundred kilometers of space...the entire Mount Mooncrescent was covered by it. But of course, they didn’t activate the formation yet. Once they did, Adept Mooncrescent and Yu Dong would instantly notice.

The dragon-headed warship flew towards the air above the estate. Yu Dong and his beautiful, bewitching junior apprentice-sister were openly engaging in lewd, lascivious acts within their estate. Yu Dong, despite acting in a crazed manner, had a very calm look in his eyes; only, he would occasionally let out a vile laugh.

“YU DONG!”

Suddenly, a voice rang out from on high. Yu Dong, shocked, instantly came to a halt, while his junior apprentice-sister also came to a halt and said, puzzled, “Senior apprentice-brother, who is it?”

“Hurry and get up.” Yu Dong’s body quickly became covered by his robes, and the same happened for his junior apprentice-sister, Yu Wei.

Yu Dong called back in a warm, loud voice, “Which fellow Daoist has come?” At the same time, he released the protective formation. He immediately saw the dragon-headed warship in the distant skies. Upon seeing it, Yu Dong felt a slight hint of surprise; he was an experienced person, after all, and he knew that no ordinary Immortal cultivator would be in possession of such a fine construct-warship.

“Junior apprentice-sister, hurry up and ask Master to come,” Yu Dong sent mentally. “Understood.” A leaf appeared in Yue Wei’s hands, and she lightly twisted it.

Right at this moment...

A handsome, delicate-looking youth dressed in furs flew down from the dragon-headed warship. He had an azure serpent wrapped around one wrist, while a white-haired, white-robed man and a white-robed youth were behind him. The fur-clad youth, the leader of the group, said in a calm voice, “An old friend, of course!”

Chapter 8: The Mysterious Adept Mooncrescent

The highest hall on Mount Mooncrescent.

“My daughter, Wei?” The sinister old man’s face changed. His daughter had shattered the talisman he had given her, and he could clearly sense that the talisman had been shattered in Yu Dong’s nearby estate.

“What’s going on? With Yu Dong protecting her, what sort of problems could Wei have encountered, that she would suddenly break the talisman? This is Mount Mooncrescent.” Adept Mooncrescent couldn’t believe that in his own territory, his daughter would encounter any danger.

Swoosh!

Adept Mooncrescent instantly transformed into a streak of black light, departing from his hall and charging towards the skies, flying towards Yu Dong’s estate.

Given how fast peak Wanxiang Adepts moved at, as soon as Ji Ning emerged from his dragon-headed warship, Adept Mooncrescent appeared before him.

“This is...?” Adept Mooncresscent, upon seeing the distant dragon-headed warship in the skies, and upon seeing Ji Ning and Mu Northson, couldn’t help but secretly feel alarmed. Given his experience and judgment, he could immediately tell, just through that distant glance, that these were definitely no ordinary cultivators. No wonder his daughter had instantly shattered the talisman.

“I wonder which Daoist friends have come to visit my Mount Mooncrescent,” Adept Mooncrescent said with a loud laugh. “Why haven’t you come to visit me, and have instead come to my disciple’s place?”

His voice reverberated in the air, and as it did, Adept Mooncrescent landed in the courtyard, standing in front of Yu Dong and Yue Wei, who respectfully moved backwards.

“Who are they?” Adept Mooncrescent sent to them.

“Daddy, I’ve never met them before,” Yue Wei hurriedly sent.

“Master, I’ve never met them either,” Yu Dong said.

“Hmph, if you don’t know them, why would they suddenly come to my place, but not come visit me, and instead visit you?” Adept Mooncrescent barked mentally at them, and Yu Dong didn’t dare to say a single word in response.

However, Adept Mooncrescent still had a smile on his face. He looked towards Ning and the others in midair. “Fellow Daoists, it seems as though my disciple doesn’t know you; why, then, do you say that you are old friends?”

“Adept Mooncrescent.” Ning took a single step forward, descending from the skies to the estate below. Northson and the Whitewater Hound followed behind him. Ning said, “I have something to discuss with your disciple, Yu Dong. I’d like to ask you, Adept Mooncrescent, and your daughter to temporarily withdraw.”

Yu Dong’s face changed, and Adept Mooncrescent couldn’t help but feel shocked as well. Previously, he had only spoken mentally with his daughter, but this fur-clad youth actually knew that they were father and daughter...clearly, he had come prepared.

“Withdraw?” Yue Wei grew frantic. Her loyalty had long since been given to Yu Dong, and she couldn’t help but mentally send, “Daddy, we have no idea who these people are. You can’t let senior apprentice-brother face them on his own.”

“Daughters always favor outsiders.” Adept Mooncrescent frowned as he looked at his daughter. At the same time, Yu Dong sent frantically, “Master, it seems to me that these people must have come with a plot in mind.”

“Leave it to your master,” Adept Mooncrescent snapped back, then laughed loudly. “You wish to speak in private with my disciple, but I don’t even know who you are...isn’t this a bit too impolite?”

Ning's divine sense covered the entire mountain. Thus, although Adept Mooncrescent had arrived quite quickly, Ning could've killed Yu Dong even more quickly. Still, the hatred he felt towards the murderer of his parents had caused Ning's heart to become filled with rage. To kill his enemy so quickly? That would be letting him off so easily.

What Ning wanted was for this man to die in regret, agony, and despair! Only thus would he be able to give vent to the hatred in his heart!

"Adept Mooncrescent." Ning's face sank. "I respected you, which is why I asked you to leave. To tell you the truth, the reason I wish to speak in private with your disciple, Yu Dong, is because I suspect that he is colluding with a criminal I am pursuing."

"Colluding with a criminal?" Adept Mooncrescent was startled.

"Colluding?"

Yue Wei and Yu Dong were both greatly shocked as well. Ning waved his hand, and a medallion appeared within it, atop which was the image of a Raindragon.

"The Raindragon Guard!" Adept Mooncrescent's face turned solemn. He knew that trouble had truly arrived today; anyone capable of becoming a Raindragon Guard was a true elite, and even he didn't feel confident in being able to defeat this youth in front of him.

Yue Wei felt nervous as well; to her, a Zifu Disciple, any Raindragon Guard was an incomparably powerful individual.

As for Yu Dong, he was absolutely panicking. "I've never offended the Raindragon Guard, and I've never met these three. What on earth is going on?" He quickly went through a mental list of those he had killed, but no matter what, he couldn't find any flaws in his plots; he had no idea what these people had come for.

"I've come to Mount Mooncrescent for the purpose of seeking out Yu Dong and chatting with him," Ning said coldly. "Adept Mooncrescent, are you going to interfere in the Raindragon Guards carrying out their cases?"

Adept Mooncrescent's face clenched. He definitely wouldn't be able to

handle the repercussions of such an act. But at this time, Yu Dong spoke out. He said respectfully, "I don't know what you wish of me, milord Raindragon Guard; if you are asking questions pertaining to a case, why must you avoid my master? If you have any questions, ask away; I, Yu Dong, will definitely be fully honest and speak no word which is not true."

Having clawed to his current position over many years, Yu Dong was an incomparably intelligent man. Since this 'Raindragon Guard' insisted on separating him from his master, he definitely wouldn't let his master leave. Once his master left, he would probably be at the complete mercy of this man, without any protection at all.

"Right. If you have any questions, ask them here," Adept Mooncrescent said hastily. "I definitely won't interfere in the Raindragon Guards carrying out a case."

Ning's face sank. This Adept Mooncrescent had reached the peak of the Wanxiang level more than two centuries ago, and was close to the end of his life. Because of this, Ning didn't dare to underestimate him at all. Although his talent was inferior to the likes of Dong One, he had trained for very long and must have had many fortuitous encounters; an old fellow like him would surely have many tricks up his sleeve.

To take away Yu Dong while he was present would be quite difficult. As for Northson, he pointed towards Adept Mooncrescent and cursed angrily, "Mooncrescent, we Raindragon Guards are carrying out a case, but you are here causing trouble. I urge you to immediately depart! Otherwise... don't blame us two brothers for being merciless!"

"Two sirs," Adept Mooncrescent said, a smile still on his face, "This is the talisman of the Northmont clan of Stillwater." As he spoke, a blood-red medallion appeared in his hands, with the characters 'North' and 'Mont' atop it. "You can refuse to give face to Snowdragon Mountain, but you should still give face to the Northmont clan of Stillwater, yes? If you have any questions, ask them right now. If you have no questions, hurry up and leave."

"A medallion of the Northmont clan?" Ning was startled. This wasn't

something an ordinary person could produce. The medallion which Baiwei had given him was merely the medallion of his father, Northmont Blacktiger, not the true medallion of the Northmont clan.

As good friends of Baiwei, he had learned quite a few things. Someone capable of producing the ‘blood medallion of the Northmont clan’ was definitely someone who had a deep connection to the Northmont clan of Stillwater.

“It’s been so many years, and this is only the second time I’ve ever taken out this medallion.” Adept Mooncrescent looked towards Ning’s group. “I haven’t much longer to live, and I really don’t want to trouble the Northmont clan to help me.”

Although his words were casual, the threat behind them was real. This caused looks of delight to appear on the faces of Yue Wei and Yu Dong.

“Senior apprentice-brother, what should we do?” Northson sent mentally. “This old fellow was actually able to take out a medallion of the Northmont clan; I imagine he has an impressive background. How about we step back for now...then find another chance later?”

“Adept Mooncrescent.” A hint of anger was in Ning’s gaze. “You have truly decided to stand up for him?”

Adept Mooncrescent smiled, then nodded. He could tell that this Raindragon Guard appeared fierce but was actually nervous; he trusted that this person would soon leave.

“You can protect him for now, but I refuse to believe you can protect him forever!” Ning turned and said, “Junior apprentice-brother, let’s go.”

“Hmph.” Northson let out an angry snort as well, also turning and leaving.

But right at this moment...a savage look flashed through the eyes of Ning, who had just turned his back on Adept Mooncrescent. This was savagery born from long-suppressed hatred. However, since Adept Mooncrescent and Yu Dong couldn’t see Ning’s face...they were feeling quite smug, and a smile was actually on Adept Mooncrescent’s own face.

“Rumble...”

Ning’s powerful divine will suddenly swept outwards like a raging river, crushing directly towards Adept Mooncrescent. BOOM! It viciously collided against his soul. [Soulshaker Art]!

Adept Mooncrescent was close to the end of his life, and he now only cared for enjoying himself; as a result, his Dao-heart had actually weakened considerably. Still, since Adept Mooncrescent would never encounter the Three Calamities and Nine Tribulations, he hadn’t cared too much about the weakening of his Dao-heart. At this moment, however, as Ning’s divine will came crushing downwards, Adept Mooncrescent instantly felt his soul shudder.

“Not good! A divine will art!” He had many years of experience, and he had risked his life many times in the past for the Northmont clan. His Dao-heart was consequently still quite firm, and he was instantly shocked. “Wake up! Wake up!” Adept Mooncrescent’s soul was struggling fiercely, and a hint of clarity appeared in his eyes. “Saber formation!”

Just as he was about to activate the supreme technique which he had used to dominate the region, the ‘Mooncrescent Saber Formation’, a mesmerizingly beautiful and seemingly slow sword-light flashed.

The sword-light was absolutely breathtaking! Just as ten black sabers appeared in the surrounding area and were about to join together to block, the sword-light slashed past one of the black sabers...and chopped directly onto the body of Adept Mooncrescent. The two scimitars in Adept Mooncrescent’s hands moved to block, but were knocked flying away.

Slash! His body was rent in half, and blood splattered everywhere. Ning appeared directly behind Adept Mooncrescent, Darknorth Sword in hand.

In that instant...he had used the [Soulshaker Art], the [Starseizing Hand], the Windwing Evasion, and also the Manifold Thistlethorns of the [Three-Foot Sword]!

In that instant, Ning had completely exploded forth with his most powerful attacks! This was an old fellow who had lived for very long, and who had an unfathomable background...Ning didn’t want to waste too

much time with him. If he did, who knew what might happen? Ning's subconscious had been warning him...that this old fellow would be extremely hard to deal with! He had to instantly execute the old man as he was feeling smug and overconfident.

"You...you killed..." Yu Dong came to his senses. Staring at Adept Mooncrescent's bisected body, his face completely changed.

Darknorth Sword in hand, Ning stared coldly at him. The icy look in his eyes caused Yu Dong's heart to shudder. Ning said in a growling, cold voice, "Forget about a damn medallion...even if members of the Northmont clan were present, I would still kill him!"

Chapter 9: Why, Why?!

Yu Dong felt despair. The youth in front of him was simply too terrifying; he had actually killed Yu Dong's master, Adept Mooncrescent, in an instant...and that divine will attack! Yu Dong had personally sensed it as well, and had gone dizzy for a brief moment. He knew exactly what that sort of short-term dizziness represented in a battle between Immortal cultivators, where life and death was determined in an instant.

"Milord Raindragon Guard." Yu Dong was incomparably frantic; he could sense the surging, killing intent coming from the person before him. "Are you sure there isn't a mistake? I, Yu Dong, have always been unwilling to offend people, and in fact, I've never offended others. Milord Raindragon Guard, is it possible that you've been deceived? Killing me isn't a major matter, but if you were to let the real culprit escape, that'd be a disaster."

Yu Dong was trying his best to dissuade Ning. Ning just laughed. "Deceived?" His laughter caused Yu Dong to shiver. Could it be that Ning's father and mother had deceived him? In addition, Ning's Uncle White, who had personally experienced the events of that year, was standing right next to him. How could there be any mistake?

"The real culprit is enjoying himself while you, milord, have been deceived into acting against me," Yu Dong said frantically. Ning, seeing the frantic, terrified look on Yu Dong's face as he tried to dissuade him, only felt a surge of satisfaction in his heart. The more panicked his enemy was, the more agonized and desperate he was, the more satisfied Ning would be!

"Father. Mother. Uncle. Can you see this?" Ning murmured in his heart. "This Yu Dong is just the first one. All of them will slip into despair. They will die in regret," Ning promised himself.

Yu Dong watched as the freezing light in Ning's eyes continued to grow, and he couldn't help but grow increasingly frantic. What should he do? What should he do?

He had yet to become a true leader within Snowdragon Mountain; had yet to make his name known throughout the world. How could he die like this? Yu Dong's heart was filled with a strong unwillingness to accept this. What he desired the most was not to slowly, stealthily clamber his way up to the top using tricks and stratagems; he wanted to use absolute power to shock the world and be revered by countless individuals.

He had yet to truly explode onto the world's stage! The vast world had yet to hear of his name! "I have to go all out!" Yu Dong felt as though he had become suddenly trapped back into his early, childhood days when he had to fight and kill, with only a hint of a chance of survival. Success meant that he would rise to the heavens, while failure meant that he would die without a place to be buried.

The same was true right now. If he were to escape, he would be able to soar to the heavens. If he died, he would truly not even have a place to be buried.

"Junior apprentice-sister." Yu Dong looked towards Yue Wei, then sent urgently, "Help me stop him at any cost." He trust in his junior apprentice-sister, trusted in his own abilities. He knew with absolute certainty that his junior apprentice-sister wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice her own life for him.

Yue Wei's eyes reddened, and infinite love radiated from her eyes. "Do it!" Yu Dong howled mentally. Swoosh! Yue Wei threw herself straight towards Ning, just like a moth throwing itself into a flame. Her Zifu Lake instantly began to detonate. Tears were at the corners of Yue Wei's eyes, and she stared at Yu Dong with a longing look in her eyes as she sent to him, "Senior apprentice-brother, I truly do love you!"

BOOM!

Ning's Waterflame Lotus had both dire-ice and earthflame merged into it. The power of his Waterflame Lotus was consequently much greater than before...the self-detonation of a Zifu Disciple wouldn't be able to move him in the slightest.

"Senior apprentice-brother, I truly do love you!" Her voice echoed in his

mind, and even Yu Dong felt his heart shake. But then, he instantly suppressed this feeling. He understood that this ‘love’ his junior apprentice-sister felt towards him was nothing more than a natural ‘love’ that would emerge once a person’s soul had been completely dominated and tamed. It was precisely because her mind had been tamed that she was willing to die for him.

Was this love?

This was just slavery!

BOOM. As the explosion rang out, Yu Dong instantly fled far away, and as he did, he produced an insect nest in his hands. “Children, go, stop them!”

The nearby Northson and Whitewater Hound just watched, not interfering. As for Ning, the Waterflame Lotus around him first blocked the self-detonation of that woman, and then greeted the countless venomous pests that swarmed towards him. The enormous Waterflame Lotus was imbued with both dire-ice and earthflame, which were no weaker than divine abilities. However, after imbuing both into the Waterflame Lotus, they both reached new heights of power.

Under that grinding, killing power, the countless venomous pests were all ground into dust, without a single one of them able to survive for even a moment. Seconds later, the countless, heaven-covering swarm of venomous pests that had been attacking Ning had all been reduced to dust.

“Hahaha...” Yu Dong had charged far away into the distance, and activated a bewildering formation. Instantly, the area around him changed and twisted into illusions as he remained within its borders.

“Do you think that you’ll be able to escape, just because you are hiding within a bewildering formation?” Ning took a single step forward, towards the formation.

Ning appeared to be quite brash and arrogant, but in truth, he was being extremely cautious. His divine sense had already covered this entire area, to a distance of a hundred kilometers, and everything was under his

control. If a Primal Daoist suddenly appeared, Ning would no longer delay, and would instantly kill Yu Dong. But now? Since no one had appeared to stop him, Ning would slowly torment him.

The long-suppressed hatred within Ning's heart made it so that he wasn't willing to let the man die too easily.

"What?" Within the bewildering formation, Yu Dong watched as Ning walked in. Ning didn't appear to be the slightest bit puzzled or baffled by the formation, and he walked directly towards Yu Dong. "How can this be?! Seal it!" Yu Dong once again used a formation technique; this was his estate, and naturally he had quite a few formations present.

A blurry light sprang up, protecting him. Swish. A sword-light flashed past, and Ning easily chopped apart the grand sealing formation.

"Too weak." Ning continued to slowly stroll forward.

"Teleport." Yu Dong clutched at his precious Lesser Teleportation Dao-seal, intending to flee...but it was completely useless.

"The surrounding region has already been spacelocked." Ning continued to walk towards him.

Yu Dong finally went berserk. He howled with rage, "What the hell do you want?! The bewildering formation is useless against you, you effortlessly killed my venomous bugs, you killed even my master with a single sword blow...and you even prepared a spacelock formation in advance! You are so powerful and so calculating...what the hell did I do to piss you off?"

Instantly, a figure appeared before him, moving as fast as lightning. A sword-light pierced directly into Yu Dong's dantian. One magic treasure after another tumbled out from his body. Only the magic robe he wore on him, as well as the bracer on his arm, remained his; the rest all fell out, no longer under his control. This sword attack was so fast that Yu Dong wasn't even able to dodge.

"You...you!" Yu Dong stared. Ning replied calmly, "The Zifu in your dantian has already been destroyed by me."

Yu Dong was absolutely terrified. The Zifu in his dantian was his foundation as a cultivator; it had been destroyed, just like that? In the instant it had been destroyed, a feeling of weakness suddenly filled his body, causing him to be incomparably terrified...

“Why don’t you just kill me cleanly?” Yu Dong howled with rage. “Kill you?” Ning shook his head. “I simply destroyed your Zifu in your dantian because I was afraid that you would commit suicide.” If the Zifu was present, Yu Dong would’ve been easily able to self-detonate his Zifu Lake.

But with his Zifu destroyed, Yu Dong had been transformed into an ordinary mortal. But of course, despite being an ‘ordinary’ mortal, his body had been nourished for many years by elemental ki, and so it would still be quite powerful, comparable to an ordinary Xiantian lifeform. Unfortunately, he was now no longer able to use magic treasures; naturally, he wouldn’t even be able to kill himself in front of Ning.

“Afraid that I’d commit suicide?” A look of terror appeared on Yu Dong’s face. What the hell sort of a grudge was this? This person wouldn’t even let him commit suicide?

With the destruction of his Zifu, the formation around him naturally vanished. Northson and the Whitewater Hound walked over as well.

“Enjoy this,” Ning said with a cold laugh. His elemental ki quickly formed into a shining runic seal in front of him. Upon seeing the shining rune, Yu Dong seemed to realize something. Instantly, utter horror appeared on his face, and he immediately turned to flee. Ning, with a gentle flick of his fingers, sent that shining runic seal into Yu Dong’s body.

“NO!” Yu Dong let out a miserable cry, his skin and his bones beginning to twist and his skin beginning to turn red. “AHH, AHHHH!!” An agonized scream ripped out from his throat.

Yu Dong was like a lobster that was being boiled alive; his entire body was turning red, and he fell to the ground, beginning to twitch and twist about. He felt as though countless bugs were crawling beneath his skin, and could even see his skin begin to char and turn black.

“The Heartburner Art?” Northson was secretly shocked. This was a torturing technique possessed by the Black-White College’s Dao Repository Vault. Because it didn’t have much combat potential, one didn’t need too many black-white pellets to trade for it.

Ning had memorized it long ago. When he had memorized it...it was for the purpose of allowing his enemies to enjoy its taste! Enjoy the taste of having their hearts been set aflame! When Ning’s father and mother had died, he himself had been filled with the utmost of agony, despair, and hatred. He had decided long ago to do the same in gaining revenge!

“Tell me tell me tell me tell me...” Yu Dong howled hoarsely as he stared at Ning, his eyes filled with madness.

“You are actually still clear-minded. Even though you have the soul of a Wanxiang Adept, for you to stay awake for so long is inconceivable.” Ning let out a cold snort. “It seems as though your Dao-heart is even stronger than I had anticipated.”

“Why, why?!” Yu Dong’s eyes were filled with resentment. As for Ning, he turned towards Uncle White, who was by his side. Uncle White instantly transformed into mist, then reformed into a large, snowy white hound.

“Yu Dong. Do you remember me?” The Whitewater Hound looked towards Yu Dong. Yu Dong’s agonized eyes were suddenly filled with shock and resentment. Immortal practitioners had nearly perfect memories. Because Uncle White was now a Wanxiang Diremonster, and because he was in human form, Yu Dong had been unable to recognize him earlier. Now that Uncle White had returned to his true form...Yu Dong immediately thought back to the events of that year...

“Young master, look. That little lady looks quite attractive. That face, that aura, that attitude...ohoho!”

“Mm, not bad at all! And she seems to be pregnant as well...hah, just what I like. The two of you, go over there and catch that little lady alive. Be careful though; those two men next to her should both be Zifu Disciples. The two of you had best not grow careless and fail.”

“Don’t worry, young master.”

“Young master, leave it to us. We’ll definitely catch that little lady and bring her over to you.”

Those events...that battle...everything came to his mind. Deep in his memory, he thought back to how both of those men had been willing to sacrifice their lives for that woman.

“Little Sister, the two of you, go!”

“Snow, go. Little White, take her away!”

In that battle, he and his accomplice, ‘Shui Yi’, were both just peak Zifu Disciples, while their opponents had both used forbidden arts. That woman’s older brother...he was enormously powerful! He had been able to lock down the two of them and let that woman, along with the other, heavily wounded youth, to escape.

However, in the end, he and Shui Yi had naturally killed that woman’s older brother in their rage.

“They...they...” Yu Dong’s entire body was beginning to char. He stared towards Ning with completely bloodshot eyes.

“They were my father, mother, and uncle!” Tears began to appear in Ning’s eyes, and he growled out, “And I, I was the child that woman was pregnant with. I...have come for revenge!”

Chapter 10: A Disaster Caused

“My uncle, Yuchi Mount. My mother, Yuchi Snow. My father, Ji Yichuan!” Ji Ning stared at him, his eyes filled with pain and madness. “At the time, you didn’t give a damn about them at all, did you? In fact, you’ve forgotten all about them. But now, I have come to take revenge for them!”

Ning’s words came one at a time from the innermost depths of his heart. As for Yu Dong, he could feel the hatred oozing from the fur-clad youth. “This youth...he’s the child that woman was pregnant with?”

“Twenty years...it’s only been twenty years. That child was born, and now is easily able to kill my master, Adept Mooncrescent. I...what the hell type of an enemy have I, Yu Dong, created for myself.” Yu Dong had always been extremely cautious and unwilling to offend important figures. Even when killing a few geniuses, he had been extremely cautious and made sure to leave behind no clues that it had been him.

Unexpectedly, that pregnant woman he had simply wanted to catch in order to flatter and pander to young master Dong Seven had given birth to such a terrifying youth.

“I...I actually fell due to this?”

Yu Dong in absolute agony due to his torment, but in his mind, one scene after another flashed by. Scenes of how he had clawed his way up the ladder as a youth. In order to reach further heights, he had been willing to do anything! He had even been able to toy with and manipulate figures who were more powerful than him, and he had made them into his pawns. And now, he had become a Wanxiang Adept.

“I’ve been calculating my entire life, but I failed due to this...” Yu Dong’s eyes were filled with torment. Suddenly, he let out a final, furious howl. “The heavens conspired against me! I don’t accept this, I can’t accept this!!!”

As his howl rang out and echoed in the estate, Yu Dong’s charring body suddenly began to blaze with fire as his entire body started to roast. As for Ning, he just watched calmly. Suddenly, an incense burner appeared in

his hands. “Collect it!” Ning willed this to be done.

Ning’s divine sense could clearly see a soul be absorbed directly into the incense burner. There were many types of magic treasures that were meant to be used against the soul, such as the ‘Myriad Wraiths Banner’ and the like, that were capable of sucking souls into them. As for Ning’s incense burner, it was an item with a different purpose that had a similar effect. However, it was just meant to absorb in a soul and then destroy the soul’s power; it could be considered a sort of supportive treasure that couldn’t actually be used to attack.

“This Yu Dong can be considered a formidable figure as well,” Northson sighed. “He was able to claw his way up from an ordinary commoner to the Wanxiang Adept level, and was even able to make Adept Mooncrescent’s daughter be willing to sacrifice her life for him! Formidable!”

Halfway through his words, Northson suddenly stopped speaking. He couldn’t help but look at the nearby Ji Ning. This Yu Dong was Ning’s hated enemy, after all.

Ning’s gaze was as deep and tranquil as the waters of a lake. He glanced calmly at the blazing corpse on the ground, then said calmly, “He was indeed a formidable figure. However, he was unscrupulous in his actions...for the sake of being able to reach a higher position, he was willing to do anything! For the sake of ingratiating himself to that young master Dong Seven, he was actually willing to act against my mother, even though she was pregnant! For the sake of protecting my mother, my uncle died on the spot, while my father’s future potential in his Immortal path was shattered.”

“In the end, Mother and Father still died. Just for the sake of ingratiating himself with Dong Seven, he was able to do such a thing...” Ning thought back to what he had seen with his divine sense, and how Yu Dong had treated Yue Wei as he might a sex slave. This person was completely unscrupulous. As the saying went, if one often walked by the river, eventually, one’s shoes would get wet. Even if Yu Dong didn’t fall in Ning’s hands today, eventually, a different expert would have come to kill

him!

The path of Immortal cultivation was one of self-reliance! Tricks, strategies, outside sources of help, waylaying others...they would only allow one to rise to prominence briefly. In the end, the grave would await.

Self-reliance was the only true, eternal path!

"Whoosh." Ning waved his hand, collecting all of the magic treasures within the courtyard. "Let's hurry up and leave." Ning looked towards Northson and Uncle White. "Earlier, that Adept Mooncrescent gave me a very bad feeling. I imagine he must have a significant background; we cannot tarry here."

"Alright." Uncle White nodded. "Right." Northson agreed as well. "That blood medallion of the Northmont clan proves that he is dangerous."

Soon, Ning's group quietly snuck away from Mount Mooncrescent. Nobody noticed their departure at all.

In midair. The dragon-headed warship once more changed colors, to a pure, pitch-black color as it slowly flew forward. "Father. Mother. Uncle." Ning quietly murmured to them, "I've already killed one of our three enemies. Don't worry. Not a single one of them will survive! And uncle's only child...one day, I'll find a way to find her."

Based on what Ning's father had said, his uncle had a single daughter. But where exactly was this cousin of his? What was her name? What did she look like? Unfortunately, Ning didn't know the answer to any of these questions. It would be very hard to find her.

However, Ning didn't give up, because the more powerful an Immortal cultivator was, the more options they would have to them...he had heard that some legendarily powerful Immortals could, with the flick of a finger, even be able to calculate what events would unfold in the future. If, in the future, he was able to learn these techniques, searching for his cousin probably wouldn't be too difficult.

The nearby Whitewater Hound just watched quietly. He also felt incomparably excited at having been able to kill one of their hated foes,

and also felt gratified in his heart. He murmured silently to himself, “Big Brother, our child Ning has grown more and more powerful. Even a peak Wanxiang Adept was slaughtered by him. Ning’s name will definitely be spread throughout the vast, endless world, and he will become a truly influential and famous figure in the world ruled over by the Grand Xia Dynasty.”

“Senior apprentice-brother.” Northson spoke out. Ning looked over to him. “Shall we go to the Cloudfields?” The Snowcloud Fields was the place where the Dong clan had established their foundations. Shui Yi was a Zifu Disciple of the Dong clan. If they were to kill Shui Yi, they would naturally have to go to the Snowcloud Fields. “Yes. We’ll go right now,” Ning said.

“But that’s an extremely large clan,” Northson said hurriedly. “They have more than ten Wanxiang Adepts, and it is also the tribe of a Primal Daoist. Although that Primal Daoist stands guard over Snowdragon Mountain, he certainly will have left some protective techniques for his clan. And, at a critical moment, the Primal Daoist himself might hurry back.”

Ning nodded. “I know. Don’t worry, junior apprentice-brother. I’m not so arrogant as to go head-on against a Primal Daoist.”

“It’s good that you are clear-minded.” Northson nodded. When he had watched Ning kill Yu Dong, Northson had begun to worry. He had personally undergone a similar experience, and he knew that once one faced the killers of one’s parents, one might go berserk, at which point one really might be capable of anything. He didn’t wish for Ning to throw his life away.

“Ning, my son,” the nearby Whitewater Hound urged, “As I see it, let’s first investigate the treasures left behind by Adept Mooncrescent. I, too, continue to feel as though that Adept Mooncrescent was a very dangerous person.”

“Alright.” Ning and Northson both nodded. They immediately began to bind the magic treasures left behind by Adept Mooncrescent and began to

search through his storage-type magic treasures.

Mount Mooncrescent was as calm and peaceful as before. The servants and retainers didn't even know that Adept Mooncrescent had died. However, roughly two hours after Ning's group had left, the surrounding space began to boggle and twist.

Slash! A completely pitch-black sword-shaped warship appeared in the air above the mountain. Swoosh, swoosh, swoosh. One blood-robed figure after another immediately flew out from it, and in the blink of an eye, the skies became filled with thirteen of them. Their leader had a silvery flying sword embroidered on the sleeves of his robes. As for the other twelve, they had grayish flying swords embroidered on their sleeves.

"Rumble..." A powerful divine sense instantly swept downwards, covering the area. The leader of the blood-robed men, a bald figure, had bizarre runes atop his skull. His gaze was icy cold as he stared downwards.

"Captain? Second Brother, he...?" A blood-robed man next to the leader whispered. "He's dead." The bald, blood-robed man's voice was gravelly; it sounded ear-piercing, like sabres clashing against each other. "Although his corpse has already been destroyed by the murderer, the aura of the battle is still present, and the scent of Second Bro's blood remains in the air. Actually, back when Second Bro's candle, which we had within our main hall alongside all the other candles, went out, he had already died! Only, none of you were willing to believe it..."

"How could that be? Old Second Bro was close to the end of his life, and he had returned to Mount Mooncrescent to enjoy his retirement. He didn't have any enemies, and even if he did, when he took out our blood medallion of the Northmont clan, shouldn't he have been able to scare them off? Who would have dared to forcibly kill Old Second Bro?"

"Old Second Bro was extremely powerful as well. Old Second Bro acquired his Mooncrescent Saber Formation thanks to his many military accomplishments, and it was tremendously powerful. Perhaps a few geniuses at the Wanxiang level would be able to defeat him, but he

should still be able to withstand them for a period of time. Giving his fleeing abilities, he shouldn't have found it too difficult to escape."

"The only possibility is that someone knew all of Old Second Bro's abilities, and so specially set things up so that they could kill him at one blow."

The group continued to chat amongst themselves.

"Old Second Bro fought in our squad for more than a century. Countless generations of brothers formed lifelong friendships with him! He had returned to his own Mount Mooncrescent, but was killed by someone here? The other old brothers won't accept this lying down. Others should feel relieved if we don't bully them; who dares to bully us?! We definitely must avenge him!"

"We must take revenge!"

"Whoever killed Old Second Bro, we must kill him. We'll destroy his soul."

"The brothers of the Shadow Army cannot be killed without repercussion."

All of the blood-robed figures were filled with furious, baleful auras.

As for the bald, blood-robed leader, he said in a cold voice, "Investigate! We must investigate this thoroughly! We need to find out who killed Old Second Bro. He had gone home to enjoy his retirement, but they still refused to spare him...we must find the killer."

"Right."

"Yes."

They all nodded.

"Let's go back. I'll ask the Old Captain to help and also have the headquarters of the Shadow Army to initiate an investigation into who the murderer is." The bald man said in a cold, grim voice, "Let's go."

Whoosh. The group of blood-robed men all flew back into that pitch-black, sword-shaped warship. A spatial ripple once more appeared, and

then the pitch-black warship disappeared into thin air once more.

As for Ning, Northson, the Whitewater Hound, and Qingqing, they were going through the relics left behind by Adept Mooncrescent. Yu Dong's items were mostly Mortal-ranked, and so they were the first to be bound. Ning's group was surprised as the items contained within his storage treasures, because his wealth was actually comparable to Dong One and Northriver Zhou's.

However, Ning's group was primarily interested in binding Adept Mooncrescent's magic treasures. Finally, they were able to bind one of the storage-type magic treasures he had left behind, and they took out one item after another from within. Ning's group began to closely investigate them. And as they did...all of their faces changed.

"Oh, crap," Qingqing muttered softly.

Chapter 11: The Culprit, Ji Ning

After having bound Adept Mooncrescent's storage-type magic treasure and taken the items out, Ji Ning and his companion's faces changed.

"This is...!"

Ning's gaze fell upon a blood-red robe. This blood-red robe emanated a sanguine aura, and it had a grayish flying sword sown onto the sleeve.

"A battle-uniform," Mu Northson said softly. "This blood robe is covered with many runes and can also serve as a construct-type magic treasure...if my guess is correct, this should be meant to be used in unison with a group of people who all wear this same robe. They'll be able to join into one entity and unleash an extremely powerful joint attack."

Northson was a genius of the Dao of constructs; he instantly discovered this. As for Ning, although he wasn't able to understand this as clearly as his junior apprentice-brother did, he was skilled in formations and so was able to discover that this war-robe was similar to a Dao-soldier's armor.

"Judging from the complexity of the runes on this blood-red robe...it's definitely not something which an ordinary organization can produce," Northson said with a frown. "Sects like Snowdragon Mountain are completely unable to produce this sort of uniform war-robe...and in fact, most likely even my master wouldn't be able to produce it."

"He had the blood medallion of the Northmont clan," Ning said in a low voice. "It's very possible that he has some sort of a connection with the Northmont clan of Stillwater."

"Look at this." Qingqing pointed at a leather parchment. They had removed several leather parchments from the storage treasure. "Don't touch them with your hands," Ning barked. And then, he carefully inspected the contents on the leather scrolls.

"Old Second Brother, I, your brother, am going to retire as well. However, I will stay here at the Skylands world. I don't want to go back... there's nothing for me there. I've fought to subjugate the enemies for so

many years here in the Skylands world, that I have grown accustomed to it. I have so many old brothers here, and I truly don't wish to leave. In the past, you invited me to go with you to Mount Mooncrescent, but...forget it. If, in the future, you are free, please come to the Skylands world..."

The contents of the leather scroll instantly made Ning's scalp turn numb. Retired? Old Second Brother? Skylands world?

"Retired?" Northson called out in shock, "Adept Mooncrescent must've been a member of an army, and judging from the blood-red robe...the robe should be the uniform which Adept Mooncrescent wore in that army! Because he was too old and was close to the end of his life, he came back to retire here."

"Old Second Brother?" The Whitewater Hound spoke out as well. "Given how long this Adept Mooncrescent had lived for, I imagine that all of his surviving brothers must be extremely old as well, which is why they addressed him as 'Old Second Brother'. But this Skylands world..."

"Skylands world...?" Ning frowned as well.

"Can it be one of the trillions of lesser worlds?" Northson whispered.

The Three Realms were incomparably vast, and the ordinary, common worlds were exceedingly numerous. The worlds were divided into the three thousand major worlds and the trillion lesser worlds. Some of the trillion lesser worlds were naturally created by the universe, while some had been established by major powers!

"Battling in the Skylands world?" Ning mused to himself, "The blood medallion of the Northmont clan?" Ning continued to ponder, while at the same time, he began to carefully read the other leather scrolls. Some had strange maps on them, while others were letters. Ning then looked at the other items. Slowly...a hypothesis began to form in Ning's mind.

The Northmont clan of Stillwater must have had a secret, hidden army, with Adept Mooncrescent having been one of the members of this army! Ning didn't feel surprised at the fact that the Northmont clan had a secret army of its own, because the history of the Grand Xia Dynasty included quite a few rebellions by Marquisates. The mere fact that Marquisates

would attempt to rebel was a testament to how powerful and how deep their roots were. They had existed from the Fiendgod Era until the present era; this was simply too long a stretch of time.

Nobody knew exactly how deep the roots of the Marquisates were; it was quite normal for them to have secret armies of their own. As for the Skylands world, it must be one of the trillion lesser worlds, or a dimension which a major power had carved out for himself. In short, there should be living creatures within this world, which is why it needed to be subjugated.

"Senior apprentice-brother, what should we do?" Northson said softly. "It seems as though Adept Mooncrescent was most likely a member of a secret army under the control of the Northmont clan of Stillwater. And, by the looks of it, he had battled for many years for them...he definitely must have an extremely good relationship with those lifelong, battle-tested friends."

Ning nodded. After battling shoulder-to-shoulder for countless years... one could imagine how close those soldiers were! Now that Adept Mooncrescent had died in his retirement, how could those people take it lying down?

"This is trouble." Ning frowned. Still, even if he had known Adept Mooncrescent's background, Ning still would've done the same thing. Although Adept Mooncrescent had returned to Mount Mooncrescent to retire, he had still proved to be a calamity for the surrounding area. Ning had acquired quite a bit of information on Adept Mooncrescent when reading up on Yu Dong, and the description of the Adept was...he was a sinister, petty man who had offended many.

Perhaps because he had so many pent up desires in the army, as soon as he had retired, he had relied on his power to act savagely and viciously, revealing his true nature! Ning wouldn't show mercy to this sort of person.

"Ning, son, what should we do?" The Whitewater Hound looked towards Ning. "Master?" Qingqing looked towards Ning as well.

Ning frowned. “Let’s keep the liquefied elemental essence. We’ll put all the other treasures into the storage treasure, and then...Qingqing, use your Void Blink to go extremely deep underground and cast it deep into the magnetic core.”

“The deep magnetic core?” Qingqing nodded. “Understood.”

They kept only the thousand kilograms of liquefied elemental essence, and then discarded everything else, including even the jade bottle which held the essence! The liquefied elemental essence was incomparably pure and untraceable, so they could keep it, but everything else had the potential to prove problematic.

“I’m going now.” The little azure snake winked out of existence, passing through the void and disappearing. Deep underground, there was a magnetic core, and a powerful field of magnetic light that one could see with the visible eye. Qingqing carefully threw the storage-type magic treasure, now unbound, into the magnetic light.

A short time later.

Qingqing returned. “I tossed it all.” She looked at Ning, who nodded. “Good. Everyone, let’s think it over. Have we left any clues behind?”

“Senior apprentice-brother, earlier, when we appeared at Mount Mooncrescent...is it possible that the servants or disciples of Adept Mooncrescent might have noticed us?” Northson said, worried.

Ning shook his head. “Don’t worry. My divine sense covered the entire Mount Mooncrescent, and everything was within my field of observation. Only three people accidentally saw our dragon-headed warship, but at that time, the warship was under disguise and also had a different coloration. There’s no way they would’ve been able to identify us just on the basis of seeing that warship.”

“Alright.” Northson nodded. They came here secretly, and so they had naturally disguised the warship into a very ordinary, common-looking sort. “There’s no way they could find us just based on the appearance of the warship.”

“Good.” Ning nodded. “Everyone, can you think of any flaws?” They all shook their heads. They had been incomparably cautious when coming, and hadn’t even used teleportation arrays. They had flown all the way here, through the clouds and the mist. Only three people had seen their true appearances at Mount Mooncrescent; Adept Mooncrescent, Yu Dong, and Yue Wei. All three were now dead.

“Junior apprentice-brother, next I am going to act against Shui Yi. There’s no need for you to go,” Ning said. “Dealing with Shui Yi...will be much trickier than dealing with Yu Dong. Although he’s merely a peak Zifu Disciple, he’s within the Dong clan’s territory.”

“I have no ties or attachments to be worried about. Senior apprentice-brother, don’t say anything else,” Northson said firmly. Ning nodded gently. “Fine, then. Still...we need to decide on how we should deal with Shui Yi.” Ning looked around at everyone.

Qingqing said hurriedly, “It’s quite simple. Master, you have divine sense...you can effortlessly cover the entire Dong clan with it. As long as you find a chance to kill him, you can easily kill him, right?”

“It won’t be that easy.” Northson shook his head. “That’s the lair of the Dong clan, and the home of a Primal Daoist. It definitely will be guarded by numerous layers of protections, and there’s no way an outsider will be able to silently sneak in...”

Ning nodded. “Even an idiot can guess that this place must be ringed by countless formations. There’s no way to sneak in at all.”

Qingqing pouted.

“Ning, son,” the Whitewater Hound said, “Although it might be hard for us to enter the Dong clan to kill Shui Yi...why can’t we make Shui Yi come out instead?”

“Have him come out?” Ning’s eyes lit up. “Right!” Northson called out in approval as well. Ning quickly began to ponder this, and the information he had acquired on Shui Yi began to flash through his mind. Soon, he came up with a way.

"If it's hard to go in to kill him, then we'll draw him out." Ning nodded.
"Find. Then let's go right now..."

"Let's go."

Immediately, the warship, now appearing to be an ordinary, pitch-black ship, disappeared from the clouds.

They had already killed Adept Mooncrescent. There was nothing else they could do about that now! However, just as they were afraid of...Adept Mooncrescent's group of old friends wouldn't let the matter of his death rest! The entire Shadow Army wouldn't let one of its old, retired brothers die in such a manner! The members of the Shadow Army had all battled for many years together, and too many of them had died. Very, very few survived to retire. If even their retirees could be killed without rhyme or reason...how could they accept this?

"Don't worry. The old brothers of our Shadow Army won't be killed for no rhyme or reason, just like this! In other places, the intelligence reports of the Heavenly Treasures Mountain might be formidable, but here in Stillwater Commandery...the intelligence reports of our Northmont clan are even more superior!" Within the headquarters of the Shadow Army, a red-haired old man was speaking to a group of blood-robed men in a loud voice.

Stillwater Commandery was the territory of the Northmont clan. Here, the Northmont clan's roots were the deepest.

Just half a day later....

Stillwater City. Northmont Blacktiger's Estate.

"Eh?" Northmont Baiwei, who was drinking some wine and listening to music, suddenly frowned. He heard footsteps from outside. "I'm listening to music. Who dares disturb me?" A hint of anger could be seen in Baiwei's furrowed brows.

Suddenly, the door was pushed open, and a muscular, bald man dressed in an ornate black uniform walked in. Next to him was a pale-faced, beardless old man with triangular pupils. The triangle-eyed old man

seemed to have a hint of laughter on his face, but it made others shiver.

“Father!” Baiwei shot to his feet. In the face of his father, Biawei always felt uncontrollably nervous. “Baiwei.” Northmont Blacktiger’s deep, hooded gaze was like an infinitely cold pool of ice. “I ask you this – was it you who sent people to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain for an intelligence report on Yu Dong, Shui Yi, and Dong Seven?”

“Yes.” Baiwei nodded. “Why?” Blacktiger asked. Baiwei immediately said respectfully, “It was for the sake of my brother, Ji Ning, who brought his fellow disciple, Mu Northson, and asked me to assist. He didn’t wish for the Heavenly Treasures Mountain to find out, so I was extremely careful as well. Aside from myself and the our servants who carried the orders out, no one else knows.”

“Oh?” Blacktiger’s eyes were dark and cold. He said calmly, “It seems, then, that the culprits are Ji Ning and his group.”

Chapter 12: Father and Son

"The culprit is Ji Ning?" Northmont Baiwei said, frantic, "Father, what are you talking about? What 'culprit'? What are you saying?"

"Can't you guess?" Northmont Blacktiger looked at his son. This was the son who he had entrusted all his hopes to, the one whom he had always strove to train. If he hadn't placed all of his hopes on Baiwei, he would've left Baiwei to his own devices and let him become a carefree, ignorant, wastrel descendant. However, Blacktiger had instead always been very strict and exacting with him.

"Father, are you saying..." Baiwei was no fool. Frowning he said, "Brother Ji Ning didn't want for the Heavenly Treasures Mountain to know it was him, so he must've been carrying out something he couldn't let others know about! He went to kill an enemy with a powerful background? Dong Seven, Yu Dong, Shui Yi...of the three of them, the only one with a bit of a background is Dong Seven! Can it be that he killed Dong Seven? But Dong Seven has a mere Primal Daoist backing him; he isn't worthy of you, Father, acting like this."

Blacktiger nodded. "It isn't Dong Seven. He killed Yu Dong." Baiwen shook his head. "Yu Dong? He's just a minor figure."

"But Yudong's master, Adept Mooncrescent, was present at the time as well. Thus, most likely because he tried to stop Ji Ning, he was caught up in the fray and killed by Ji Ning as well." Blacktiger stared at his son. "And Adept Mooncrescent was a retired Immortal cultivator who belonged to one of the armies under the control of our Northmont clan of Stillwater, the Shadow Army."

"What?!" Baiwei's face instantly changed. Naturally, he knew that his own clan, the Northmont clan, had some hidden, powerful armies of Immortal cultivators. Every single Marquis had some armies of their own.

The Grand Xia Dynasty knew this as well. However, the exact number of secret armies, how many individuals were in each army, and how powerful the members of the armies were...those were the true secrets.

“A retired cultivator of the Shadow Army?” Baiwei began to mumble to himself, “A retiree? Then he must have fought for many, many years...he must have many old friends and brothers-in-arms. The retirees...they are the most sensitive figures for these Immortal armies.”

“Right. Just so!” Blacktiger growled, “They battle for the sake of our Northmont clan, and countless numbers of them have perished. Very, very few are able to survive and retire. If the retired cultivators are killed...the cultivators of the entire army will naturally be enraged! They absolutely will not permit this sort of event to occur, and if it were to occur, they will find out who the killer was, then take revenge for their old brother!”

“This is a sensitive, sore spot for Immortal cultivator armies! Those who touch it will die!” Blacktiger’s eyes were filled with solemnity as well. This was one of the unspoken rules of the armies; they wouldn’t permit their old, retired brethren to suffer! Absolutely not!

“Ji Ning’s group acted very cleanly and professionally,” Blacktiger said. “The intelligence division of the Shadow Army has begun their investigations, they have already searched the memories of many of the ordinary mortals who lived on Mount Mooncrescent. They’ve even found the blood-robe which Adept Mooncrescent once wore; it had been cast deep into the magnetic depths of the world.”

“However, because a total of three people had died, being Mooncrescent, his disciple Yu Dong, and his daughter Yue Wei, the Shadow Army’s intelligence division has already begun to investigate Yu Dong and Yue Wei as well. Soon, they found that someone has recently asked the Heavenly Treasures Mountain for a copy of the report on Yu Dong.”

Blacktiger stared at his son. “Following this clue, the Shadow Army’s investigations led them to my estate; the Northmont Blacktiger Estate! That is how I learned of this.”

“What should we do, then?” Baiwei was worried now. “The Shadow Army is currently following up on several leads,” Blacktiger said, “But if Shui Yi and Dong Seven both die as well, then the Shadow Army will

definitely grow convinced that the culprit had purchased intelligence reports on these three figures at the Heavenly Treasures Mountain.”

Baiwei said, frantic, “Then I’ll immediately send someone to seek out Brother Ji Ning and have him temporarily avoid killing Shui Yi and Dong Seven?”

Blacktiger shook his head. “No use. They’ll soon be able to rule out the other leads, at which point in time, they will make inquiries to us regarding this matter.”

“Then what should I do?” Baiwei said, worried. “There are two options,” Blacktiger said. Baiwei looked towards his father.

“The first option is to give up Ji Ning,” Blacktiger said. “That way, we’ll avoid all trouble.”

“Impossible.” Baiwei shook his head.

Blacktiger, seeing this, actually began to laugh. “Hahaha, that’s my boy. Right; don’t easily give up or betray your good friends and brothers! If you can so easily sacrifice them...then you’ll never be able to make any true friends and brothers! If you wish for others to be willing to risk their lives for you, you have to treat them with sincerity, understood?”

Baiwei was startled.

“Then, only the second option remains,” Blacktiger said. “Just admit that you were the one who did this deed.” Baiwei was astonished. “Me?!”

“Right. Admit to the Shadow Army that it was you who did it; it was you who sent people to investigate Yu Dong, and then who led people to kill Yu Dong! However, because Adept Mooncrescent tried to stop you...you ended up killing him as well!” Blacktiger continued, “You had no idea that Adept Mooncrescent was a retired soldier, and thus you cannot be faulted for what you did. There’s no way for the Shadow Army to insist on punishing you...as a member of the main lineage of our Northmont clan, and as someone who might become a future Marquis of Stillwater, for you to have accidentally killed Adept Mooncrescent is just a small matter.”

“If you accept responsibility for this matter, it will just be a small

matter, because in the end, the Shadow Army is the army of our Northmont clan. It won't be easy for the cultivators of our Shadow Army to make too much trouble for a main lineage descendant of the Northmont clan, just due to an accident."

"However, if anyone else were to accept responsibility, they would almost assuredly die." Blacktiger looked at his son. "Still...as a result of this, I imagine that there will be some old fellows of the Shadow Army who will hate you."

"Just hate me? A mere retired Wanxiang Adept...I would be shocked if there was even a single Loose Immortal-level cultivator who was a true friend of his! And I imagine that very, very few will truly, deeply hate me." Baiwei shook his head. "For now, I don't have anything to do with the Shadow Army. As for Brother Ji Ning, I can tell that he's the sort who is willing to shoulder difficulties for his friend. I will accept responsibility for this matter!"

"Good." Blacktiger nodded. "As for how Yu Dong, Shui Yi, and Dong Seven offended you, I'll come up with a suitable excuse." Baiwei nodded respectfully. "It shall all be as you say, Father."

"Remember!" Blacktiger looked at his son, then said softly, "You've done very well to be willing to sacrifice for your brother, but you must remember...you need to let Ji Ning know what you did for him."

"Let him know?" Baiwei was startled. "Right. Let him know about your sacrifice," Blacktiger said calmly. "You've paid a high price for him; if he doesn't even learn of it, then wouldn't that mean that you did it for nothing? If he were to 'accidentally' find out the truth of what transpired, then he will naturally feel grateful towards you."

Baiwei frowned. "Isn't that a bit artificial and contrived?" "Contrived?" Blacktiger gave his son a glance. "You just need to let him find out by 'accident'; after all, you really did take on responsibility for his actions. Remember...although you must be sincere in taking care of your friends, you need to be slightly strategic about it as well. This is the principle behind using your human resources."

"Think about what I have said." Blacktiger gave his son a frowning glance. His son was extremely intelligent, and he had high hopes for him. However, thanks to the influence of Baiwei's mother, he was sometimes excessively sincere in his treatment of his friends. Although this allowed him to make some truly good friends, a temperament like this would make it very hard for him to truly dominate and unify a powerbase.

"Let's go," Blacktiger said, leading the triangle-pupiled elder away with him. The frozen atmosphere within the courtyard instantly grew calm, and the beautiful maid who had been singing a little song nearby suddenly came to her senses. "What, what happened?"

She didn't see anything or hear anything earlier; in fact, it was as though she had lost a portion of her memories. She just vaguely remembered the master of the estate, Northmont Blacktiger, arriving. And then, by the time she regained her faculties, Northmont Blacktiger was departing.

"Strategy? Using your human resources?" Baiwei frowned. "Father...you are calculating towards everyone...and that's why Mother left you. You are you. I am myself."

His father wanted to train him and make him into a second Northmont Blacktiger.

But he was Northmont Baiwei.

The one and only Northmont Baiwei!

"I wonder how Ji Ning is doing," Baiwei worried silently to himself.

.....

Ning's group had flown for half a month and had arrived at Stillwater Commandery's 'Dawn Bay'. Dawn Bay was roughly equivalent to Swallow Mountain in size.

"Shui Yi's tribe really is puny." A ship that was six hundred meters wide was floating atop Dawn Bay. The Dawn River was more than a million kilometers in length, and it was a large river that passed through nearly half of Stillwater Commandery. Northson, atop the ship, said with a sigh,

"It actually doesn't even have a single commandery city!"

"It is quite weak." Ning nodded. The Ji clan at least had a commandery city of the Grand Xia Dynasty, the City of Ten Thousand Swords; being in possession of at least one commandery city was necessary for a clan to be considered a local hegemony. But Shui Yi's clan, the Shui clan, was truly puny.

Before Shui Yi had appeared, their clan was an extremely ordinary, weak one. Afterwards, Shui Yi had become a servant for the extremely large and powerful Dong clan, and had been trained by the Dong clan until he had risen to the Zifu Disciple level. He had also served young master Dong Seven for a long time. Naturally, he brought prominence to his Shui clan as well.

With Shui Yi's assistance, the Shui clan slowly grew more powerful and built a city of their own. But of course, it wasn't a commandery city; it was more like the Ji clan's 'West Prefecture City', a self-built city.

In addition, the Shui clan was actually under the umbrella of another clan. Because Shui Yi remained with the Dong clan, it didn't cause any troubles for the Shui clan, and so it continued to grow to the point where it now had a middle-stage Zifu Disciple guarding over it.

"Senior apprentice-brother, how are you planning to draw out Shui Yi and have him leave the Dong clan?" Northson laughed as he looked towards Ning. "Simple." Ning shook his head. "His clan, the Shui clan, is too puny; the entire clan only has a single Zifu Disciple guarding it. I have plenty of ways to send the entire Shui clan into a state of panic and chaos! To force Shui Yi to immediately hurry back!"

And indeed, he did have many methods. The Shui clan was far too weak; whenever it encountered any major troubles, it would immediately reach out to Shui Yi to beg for rescue.

"Master, let's kill them. If we slaughter the clan, it will be sent into a state of chaos," Qingqing said. But Ning shook his head. "No need."

Much like how when he killed River He of the Riverside tribe, he didn't act against River He's son, Ning wouldn't act against the other members

of the Shui clan. As to the potential fall of the Shui clan with Shui Yi's death...Ning would just calmly watch.

As an Immortal cultivator with a powerful Dao-heart, Ning was extremely confident in his actions, and he wouldn't act in a way that was contrary to his Dao-heart. If, in the past, he had acted to kill River He's son, it would have affected his faith in his own heart and would've posed a major obstacle to his path of cultivation.

"If you don't attack them, how will you throw them into a state of chaos?" Qingqing muttered.

"It'll be quite quick. Wait here. I'll pay a visit and will be back in the amount of time needed to boil a kettle of tea." A sword-light flashed into existence beneath Ning's feet, and he soared through the air, moving towards the headquarters of the Shui clan, located thousands of kilometers away; Yishui City.

Chapter 13: The End of the Road for Shui Yi

Yishui City.

This was a newly constructed city. It had been slowly built up as the Shui clan had begun to flourish, and it was guarded by the current Patriarch of the Shui clan, the Zifu Disciple, Shui Tianyi.

“Eh?”

Ning stood atop the clouds, staring downwards. His divine sense covered the entire city. By now, Ning had enough power that he could've annihilated this entire city, but as an Immortal cultivator...Ning didn't dare to massacre too many commoners. For Immortal cultivators to kill commoners was a taboo and a grave sin! But of course, if commoners dared to offend cultivators, cultivators could naturally punish them, but a large-scale massacre would result in sin swirling around one's body...and just like Bei Zishan, invite the assaults of the Raindragon Guard!

“It seems as though those ten are all potentially the Patriarch of the Shui clan.” Ning’s divine sense swept out and identified several people with fairly powerful souls and strong auras, but he wasn’t able to accurately ascertain their strength just by looking at them.

After watching for a bit longer...“It’s him.” Ning quickly picked out the actual Patriarch of the Shui clan.

.....

“Patriarch.”

“Milord.”

When Shui Tianyi was walking across the stone path, the other clansmen were incomparably respectful towards him, because he was the only Zifu Disciple guarding the clan! But of course, there was also the even more powerful ‘Shui Yi’, who was located in the distant, incomparably powerful Dong clan.

These people had no idea that the fact that they were respectfully addressing Shui Tianyi as ‘Patriarch’ had let Ning, high above them in the skies, know exactly who the Patriarch was.

“Mm.” The blue-robed Shui Tianyi’s long beard billowed in the wind. He did appear quite distinguished. Soon, he arrived at his quiet, secluded meditation room. No servants were here, and no clansmen dared to draw near. To his clansmen and servants, his meditation room was an extremely mysterious place that no one would dare to disturb.

Within the private room. Shui Tianyi sat down in the lotus position, his eyelids drooping. “My Shui clan is increasingly flourishing. The liquefied elemental essence which Elder Yi has delivered us has allowed our clan to produce three more peak Xiantian experts. If one of them were to break through to the Zifu level, that would be wonderful. Our Shui clan currently has too few Zifu Disciples!”

As the Patriarch of a tribe, Shui Tianyi held a deep desire to let his tribe grow stronger. Their current status was simply too awkward. Weak? They did have Zifu Disciples. Strong? They didn’t even have a single commandery city! An awkward status like this naturally caused Shui Tianyi and ‘Elder Yi’, these two Zifu Disciples, to rack their brains for methods for strengthening their tribes.

“Endure for now.” Shui Tianyi still remembered the words which Elder Shui Yi had told him. “Tianyi, don’t be impatient. Take things one step at a time. The roots of our tribe are simply too shallow...if we are too impatient, we might be viewed with hostility by the other great powers in the Dawn Bay region, at which point, we might be in danger of being annihilated. We need to be patient and slowly wait. Since I am with the Dong clan, the other powers of the Dawn Bay region won’t launch a war against us. When we have more Zifu Disciples in the tribe, I will bring over some of my good friends from the Dong clan and establish a base and foundation for our Shui clan!”

“Elder Shui Yi has sacrificed far too much for our tribe,” Shui Tianyi said with a silent sigh. It was only because Shui Yi had willingly entered the Dong clan as a servant that he had been able to slowly help the Shui

clan.

“Eh?” Shui Tianyi suddenly felt a powerful collision against his soul. BOOM! Everything in the world instantly went dark. A sword-light flashed past, piercing through the roof of the private room, and a figure entered the room. Ning stood there in the room, a white sack having appeared out of nowhere into his hands.

“Come in!” Ning opened the bag, and the bag instantly unleashed a powerful, wild sucking power. Whooooooooosh. The sucking power was so great that the nearby plates and utensils were all drawn in. As for the dazed and completely defenseless Shui Tianyi, he too was drawn directly into the sack. This sack was known as the ‘one-breath sack’, and was only a Mortal-ranked magic treasure. The sack possessed a sucking power that could draw objects into it, and although it didn’t seem to be larger, it could store quite a few meters worth of objects.

This sack wasn’t able to be used to actually attack others. Only when enemies were completely helpless would they be absorbed into it. To put it simply, this was used to store people! It was impossible to breathe within the ‘one-breath sack’, and so ordinary people who were drawn into it would all suffocate to death. Xiantian lifeforms and above, however, would be fine even if they couldn’t breathe.

“Hmph.” Ning immediately tied the sack off with a rope. Then, with a wave of his hand, he sent out a powerful surge of strength from his Fiendgod-enhanced arms, smashing directly against the wooden table and blasting it apart in an explosion of sound.

“Time to leave.” The large sack over his shoulders, Ning transformed into a streak of light, moving towards the hole he had created moments earlier, charging into the heavens and disappearing.

The people outside were naturally able to hear the explosive sounds which came from within the private room.

“What just happened?”

“A streak of light seemed to soar into the skies, just now.”

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! The Xiantian experts of the Shui clan all hurried over, moving so fast as to appear like blurs. Quite a few of them saw the streak of light soar into the skies, moving so fast that they could only vaguely tell that it was human-shaped.

“So fast...it should have been an Immortal cultivator.”

“A cultivator flew out from the Patriarch’s private room?”

“Not good.”

All of them began to panic.

“Look, there’s a giant hole in the roof of the private room.” The Xiantian lifeforms who had reached this place first had flown in at a high enough angle that they could immediately see the large hole in the private room’s ceiling.

“Let’s go in.”

“Quick.”

They each leapt into that giant hole.

The Shui clan was truly too weak. The strongest member of the clan, Shui Yi, was merely a servant for the Dong clan, and so only the Patriarch’s private room was made of decent materials. Ordinary Xiantian lifeforms wouldn’t be able to break through the room, but Zifu Disciples generally would be able to.

The private rooms of the formal disciples of the Black-White College, by comparison, couldn’t be broken into by even the likes of Loose Immortals.

“Where’s the Patriarch?”

“It’s a disaster zone inside.”

“The table has been smashed, and the roof was broken apart, and the Patriarch is gone.” The entire Shui clan was instantly thrown into a state of panic. The very first thing they did was to go investigate the Patriarch’s life-tablet in the ancestral hall. When they did, they let out sighs of relief.

“The Patriarch’s life-tablet is intact. The Patriarch isn’t dead.”

“But why has the Patriarch gone missing?”

“Which Immortal cultivator attacked him?”

The Shui clan remained restless and uneasy. Their most powerful cultivator, the Patriarch, had gone missing; how could they not be uneasy? At this point in time, they thought of the most powerful member of their clan; Elder Yi, also known as Shui Yi, who was a servant within the Dong clan.

“Quick, ask Elder Yi to come back.”

“Quick, ask for Elder Yi to return.”

Ning, in the clouds above, held the one-breath sack over his shoulder as he inspected the below area with his divine sense. “As I thought, they have gone to ask Shui Yi to come.” Ning revealed a smile on his face. “However, from here to the Snowcloud Fields of the Dong clan is quite far. It will take anywhere from half a month to one or two months.”

Ning glanced sideways at the one-breath sack on his shoulder. “This fellow is a Zifu Disciple. He’ll survive a month or two being trapped inside this sack.”

Time flowed on.

The Shui clan had immediately shattered an insignia, causing Shui Yi, located in the distant Dong clan, to be greatly shocked. He knew that something major must have occurred within his clan, as otherwise, they wouldn’t have shattered it.

“I have to go back right away.” Shui Yi instantly applied for a leave of absence from the high-level members of the Dong clan. As a peak Zifu Disciple, he was naturally no ordinary servant, and could be said to have some status within the clan...a leave of absence to pay a visit to his home was a small matter. The high level members of the Dong clan had naturally nodded in approval. That very day, Shui Yi had embarked on a return trip back to his clan.

Roughly half a month later.

Just a hundred kilometers away from Yishui City, atop a wild, untamed, forested mountain, there was a beautiful estate. This was Northson's construct-estate, and it was covered by formations that ensured that commoners and Xiantian experts would have no chance of discovering it. Ning's group, for now, took up residence within this place.

"Master, would Shui Yi perhaps not return?" Qingqing said, worried. Ning shook his head. "This is his tribe, and he is the most powerful member of it. How can he not come back?" Aside from a very small minority of figures who had been humiliated by their tribes, most members of a tribe who had grown up within it would feel a powerful sense of belonging to their tribes. This was part of the law of survival in this vast world. If one wanted to live a good life, the entire tribe would have to be incomparably unified.

One generation after another would do battle for the sake of the tribe; this had become a form of faith for the countless tribesmen. Even those who weren't truly infatuated with and loyal to their tribes would generally return when the tribe was in trouble.

"Eh?" A flash of sword-light suddenly appeared in Ning's eyes. The nearby white-robed Uncle White glanced towards Ning as well. "He's back?" Ning nodded. "He's back!"

"Let's go." Uncle White couldn't resist any longer as well, and Ning nodded. "Right." Swoosh! Swoosh! Ning and Uncle White soared into the skies, quickly moving towards Shui Yi, who was currently hastening back towards Yishui City.

"We'll follow them as well." Northson and Qingqing immediately transformed into streaks of light, following after them.

In midair. A green, leaf-type magic treasure was soaring through the skies, with a gray-robed Daoist standing atop it. Shui Yi had a black birthmark on his face, and he always bore a smile, which gave him a rather crafty, sly look. However, a sly, craft person like him...had been able to claw his way to increasingly greater heights within the vast Dong

clan, and rise from becoming a servant to a peak Zifu Disciple.

Actually, in addition to those who had truly formidable backgrounds, the Immortal cultivators who had clawed their way up the ladder, one step at a time, could not be underestimated!

“What exactly happened? Why did they break the seal and ask for me to return? Even Tianyi couldn’t handle this matter?” Shui Yi, till this very moment, had no idea what had happened.

“Here I am.” Shui Yi could already see the distant Yishui City. The reason why Yishui City was named Yishui was precisely because the entire clan wanted to express its gratitude to him, Shui Yi.

“Swoosh.” Just as Shui Yi controlled his green leaf-type magic treasure to soar down from the clouds, suddenly...

Swish! A streak of light suddenly flew past, blocking his way. “Eh?” Shui Yi’s face changed. Just as he was about to reach Yishui City, another cultivator had come to bar his way? Shui Yi instantly sensed danger.

He took a close look. Standing in the air opposite from him was a fur-clad youth and a white-robed man. The white-robed man appeared to be the fur-clad youth’s servant or housekeeper. The fur-clad youth just stood there, staring at Shui Yi, his eyes as cold as ice. He said in an icy voice, “So you are Shui Yi?”

Chapter 14: Return to Serpentwing Lake

"Not good." Shui Yi was secretly shocked; he could sense that both the fur-clad youth and the white-robed steward by his side both posed a serious threat to him.

This sensation came from the killing intent that filled the hearts of Ning and Uncle White. Shui Yi could sense it, and thus his heart was filled with dread.

"I am Shui Yi. Given that the two of you have stopped me, I imagine that you already know who I am." Shui Yi looked at the two of them. "I imagine that you two also expected that I would hurry back here from the distant Dong clan. Our Shui tribe is a small one, and it isn't overly ambitious; if there's anything you want, just go ahead and tell me. As long as I can accomplish it...naturally, I won't decline."

His words were simple, but at the same time, he not only issued a threat via his backers, the Dong clan, he also assumed a humble attitude. In an ordinary power struggle, this would be enough for the two sides to enter a negotiation. However...this wasn't a power struggle. This was revenge!

"I want you..." Ning suddenly moved as he executed the Windwing Evasion, and a flashing sword-light stabbed directly through Shui Yi's chest. Shui Yi wanted to dodge, and in fact, he even sent a few flying swords in front of him, but the difference in power between them was too great...in terms of power or in terms of the Dao, the difference was too great. In a single exchange, Shui Yi's chest was pierced through.

"You...you!" Shui Yi stared. His flying swords fell down from midair, and multiple magic treasures spilled out next to him. Although his storage-type magic treasure remained with him, it was now an ownerless item, because his Zifu had been completely destroyed.

"You destroyed my Zifu..." Shui Yi couldn't believe it.

"I'll take these." Ning waved his hand, collecting all of the magic treasures, then turned to stare coldly at Shui Yi. Although his Zifu had been destroyed, Shui Yi still stood there in midair, not sinking down at

all...because an enormous Waterflame Lotus had bloomed beneath him, and Shui Yi was standing right on top of it, at its center. The lotus wasn't swiveling; naturally, it contained no killing power.

"Why did you destroy my Zifu. I...I don't even know you." Shui Yi was stupefied. This sudden calamity was beyond his ability to comprehend. "Who exactly are you? Who are you!!!" Shui Yi's face began to twist and distort. With his Zifu destroyed, his Immortal path had been severed; he would have no more hopes for advancement.

"Shui Yi, do you recognize me?" The nearby Uncle White transformed into mist, and then reformed into a snowy white dog.

"A Godbeast, Whitewater Hound?" When Shui Yi saw it, memories from twenty-plus years ago suddenly flooded his mind. These were memories from back when he followed young master Dong Seven. Back then, he had done all sorts of dastardly deeds with Dong Seven, but he had been completely fearless, because the young master would be able to deal with any repercussions. That truly was an enjoyable period of time for him.

Back then, he and Yu Dong had received orders to go capture a woman... but that woman's elder brother and husband had used forbidden arts, frantically trying to block them. At that time, a snowy white dog had carried the woman away and fled.

"You...you are that Whitewater Hound?" Shui Yi looked at Ji Ning. "And you, you are...?"

"Those people you acted against were my uncle, my father, and my mother!" Ning stared at him, the cold look in his eyes causing Shui Yi's heart to tremble.

"You are that child the woman was pregnant with?" Shui Yi stared. Good heavens. It was only twenty or so years. The child that woman was pregnant with had become this powerful? Could it be that the woman was pregnant with a reincarnated Immortal?

"Hmph." With but a thought, Ning sent the elemental ki surging from his body, forming into a glowing rune that appeared in front of him. It was the Heartburner Art. The shining runic seal instantly merged into

Shui Yi's body.

"Enjoy this," Ning said with cold emotionlessness. Shui Yi instantly let out an agonized scream. His flesh and his bones began to twist and distort, and his skin turned completely red. The agony was causing him to scream in pain.

"Kill me, kill me!" Heartrending roars rang out from Shui Yi's mouth, but Ning just watched him calmly. "KILL ME!" Shui Yi bellowed. "Make it clean and fast!"

"Clean and fast? If I granted you your wish, who would come and grant me mine? Can you let my parents come back to life? Let my uncle come back to life?" Ning stared at him coldly. Shui Yi's flesh was beginning to char, and his eyes had turned completely red. This was hell itself.

"I curse you, I curse you. You'll die a miserable death, a miserable death!" Utterly agonized, Shui Yi stared death at Ning, filled with a towering rage.

Crackle, crackle, crackle...his body began to actually flicker with flames as it began to burn...

Ning produced the incense burner magic treasure. "In you go!" A soul was directly absorbed into the incense burner, then was corroded and destroyed. Ning then waved his hand, collecting all of the magic treasures that remained in the surrounding area.

Ning, previously incomparably icy, suddenly turned calm. Only, a very complicated look remained in his eyes. "Two are dead," Ning said softly.

"Ning, son, your father and your mother never would have imagined that two out of the three culprits would have died in your hands so quickly." Uncle White stood there to one side, gently patting Ning on the shoulders. "If they knew, they would definitely feel very gratified."

"The last one, Dong Seven, remains. However, he's at Snowdragon Mountain. That's the headquarters of a school; even Loose Immortals would be cautious about charging into it. I have no chance at all, right now," Ning said softly. "I'll wait. I'll let Dong Seven live for a bit longer,

but when the time comes, I'll destroy his soul as well!"

Revenge. Naturally, he wouldn't give them a chance at all. These enemies were all Immortal cultivators with extremely powerful souls. Generally speaking, after they died and went to the Netherworld Kingdom, they could cooperate and become ghost soldiers, and eventually train to become Ghost Immortals. Ning wouldn't permit this to occur.

"Let's go. The others have been waiting quite a while," Uncle White said. Ning turned his head and saw the distant Mu Northson and Little Qing. They clearly didn't want to disturb Ning as he was taking revenge, and so simply had watched from far away.

"Right. It's time to go back." Next, Ning released Shui Tianyi. They were no grudges between them; given Ning's proud disposition, he wouldn't stoop to massacring this man. However, with Shui Yi's death, in the future, the entire Shui clan would definitely begin to decay.

At the Crimson Dragon Mountains, the headquarters of the Raindragon Guard, not too far away from Stillwater City.

Ning and Northson both handed in their missions. "With these ten karmic points, we'll have a hundred years of leisure." Northson looked towards Ning. "Senior apprentice-brother, where are you planning to go?"

"I plan to go home," Ning said. "I will probably stay permanently at Serpentwing Lake in my homeland, Swallow Mountain. I'll occasionally go out and do some adventuring, but most of the time, I'll be staying at Swallow Mountain."

That place was his home.

That place had the people he was most familiar with.

That place had the underwater estate which would be of great use to him.

And similarly...it had been a long, long time since he had drifted about on a small boat on Serpentwing Lake, and enjoyed that feeling, that truly warm sensation, of being in the embrace of his father and his mother. He missed that sort of feeling.

“Back to Serpentwing Lake?” Northson paused for a moment, then said, “Senior apprentice-brother, then I’ll part with you for a time. I want to focus on analyzing the Dao of Constructs...I am going to return to the school. My master has reached an extremely deep level of understanding regarding the Dao of Constructs, and being with her is of great help to me. In addition, Master is close to the end of her life; I want to spend some time with her.”

Ning could sense that this junior apprentice-brother of his truly viewed Daoist Jadefine with affection, almost like the affection a son felt for a mother. After all, his actual mother had long since passed away.

“Alright.” Ning nodded. “Let’s split up for now. If you are free in the future, you can come to Serpentwing Lake of Swallow Mountain.”

“Right. When the time comes, I’ll definitely go to visit you, senior apprentice-brother,” Northson said with a nod. And then, Northson rode his dragon-headed warship into the skies, flying straight towards Stillwater City.

As for Ning, he just watched as his junior apprentice-brother left. Then, he turned to Little Qing and Uncle White. “Let’s go.” They walked towards the Crimson Dragon Mountain’s teleportation array. This place was rather far away from Swallow Mountain, and going through the array would be somewhat faster.

Swallow Mountain. The mountains were the same mountains; the water was the same water. A ship was soaring through its skies, and aboard it was a fur-clad youth, a large, snowy white hound, and also a little azure snake, the latest addition to the party.

“We’re back.” As Ning stared at the sight of his homeland, he revealed a hint of a smile on his face. “When I left, it was winter, and white snow covered the entire place. Upon my return...it is still the cold winter.”

When he had left the Black-White College and joined the Raindragon Guard, it had been the middle of summer. However, after the trials at the wild marshes of the Gaol Mountains, the pursuit of criminal suspects, and the killing of Yu Dong and Shui Yi, it was already the middle of

winter. The ground below was covered with silver-white decorations of snow. Swallow Mountain was a cold place to begin with, and in the winter, it was almost completely covered in snow. When Ning was born, the world was covered in snow as well.

“Serpentwing Lake.” The Whitewater Hound suddenly spoke in the human tongue. “We’re here.” Ning, too, stared at the vast Serpentwing Lake. Although snow had built up on the banks of the lake, the waters of the seemingly endless lake continued to flow forth in waves. A lake of this size...even in the coldest of temperatures, it would very rarely be completely frozen over.

“Serpentwing Lake.” Upon seeing the lake, Ning felt a surge of warmth. His mother’s ashes...his father’s ashes...they had all been sprinkled into the waters of this lake. The boat drifted downwards from the skies, landing in the middle of the lake.

“Father. Mother.” Ning looked towards the lake, then revealed a smile. “I’m back. Of our three enemies, your son was only strong enough to kill two of them for now. One of them is awaiting his turn. He, too, will die.”

“Uncle White. I’m going to sleep for a time,” Ning said. The Whitewater Hound nodded. Ning then lay down on the boat, feeling incomparably relaxed and comfortable. The boat drifted atop the surface of the lake. It felt so very wonderful, far more so than sleeping on a bed. The gentle rocking movements of the boat stop the waters of the lake...it felt like how, when he was an infant, his mother had constantly cradled him in her arms.

The boat slowly rocked forward, a Whitewater Hound lying on one side of it, and with a little azure serpent wrapped around Ning’s wrist, snuggly nestled against him.

Slowly, the boat floated towards the center, towards Brightheart Island.

Sundown. Only now did the boat draw close to the shores of Brightheart Island. Ning could sense the auras of the many people living on the island, and he naturally rose to his feet. As he rose to his feet, he saw the distant snowbanks, and a white-robed woman standing within them,

staring towards him, unable to disguise the tears within her eyes.

“Autumn Leaf!” Ji Ning revealed a smile on his face. “I’m back.”

Chapter 15: The Rise of the Ji Clan

“Young master.” Autumn Leaf’s eyes flashed with tears, but these were the tears of joy. Ning laughed as well. It had been so long since he had seen Autumn Leaf. Since he was a child, the closest to him had been his father, his mother, Uncle White, Spring Grass, and Autumn Leaf. His parents and Spring Grass had all passed away, leaving behind only Uncle White and Autumn Leaf. Ning knew that what he felt for Autumn Leaf wasn’t romantic love; it was a sort of familial love.

“Four years. Autumn Leaf, you haven’t changed much at all. You should’ve broken through to become a Xiantian lifeform.” Ning walked over to her. Autumn Leaf hurriedly wiped her tears away, then said, “It was all thanks to the medicines that you left behind, young master; they helped me to break through to the Xiantian level.”

Ning didn’t feel the slightest bit surprised by the fact that Autumn Leaf had made a breakthrough, because as someone who had been selected to be his personal handmaiden, she was naturally quite talented. With the help of the medicines he had left behind for her, Autumn Leaf did indeed have a very high chance of becoming a Xiantian lifeform.

“Have you been well, these past four years?” Ning asked.

“I’ve been alright. Brightheart Island is the same as it always has been, while the Ji clan has been growing more and more powerful,” Autumn Leaf said. “After that battle, Snowdragon Mountain’s forces in the Swallow Mountain region grew much weaker. Although they sent three more Zifu Disciples to be stationed at the Swallow Mountain branch, after news spread that you joined the Black-White College, young master, the Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain no longer dared to cause trouble.”

Ning nodded. In terms of power, since the Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain had the support of the main Snowdragon Mountain sect, it had far more experts and a much deeper base of strength than the Ji clan.

However, Ning joined the Black-White College. When Northmont Baiwei had sent people to Swallow Mountain to collect and harvest the elemental ore mines, he had also sent messengers to inform the Ji clan that Ning had joined the Black-White College. Once this news spread, the Ji clan's reputation instantly soared to unprecedented heights.

Good heavens. The Black-White College! To the powers located in the Swallow Mountain region, the Black-White College was an incomparably massive behemoth that was far beyond their level. According to legend, every single person admitted to the Black-White College was a supreme, peerless, monstrous genius. Even Snowdragon Mountain, despite its grudge against Ji Ning, had to temporarily stay their hand and let go of their hate.

"And Bluestone?" Ning asked. "Bluestone." Autumn Leaf turned and called his name out, and a tall, muscular youth ran towards them from far away.

Ning was shocked. What a tall, muscular fellow! The man was at least 1.9 meters tall, even taller than Ning himself. When Ning had left, Bluestone had been a mere youngster, but after four years...he'd actually grown so tall!

"Big Brother." Bluestone walked over. "Why were you hiding over there?" Ning laughed as he 'reprimanded' Bluestone. He had watched Bluestone grow up from his toddler years, and had long since come to view Bluestone as his own little brother.

Bluestone chortled. "I wanted to let Big Sister Autumn Leaf and you, Big Brother, have a private meeting, alright?"

Autumn Leaf instantly stared at him. As for Ning, he just laughed.

"Big Brother, why do you have a snake around your arm?" Bluestone saw the little azure snake wrapped around Ning's wrist.

"Little Qing," Ning called out. Whoosh; the little azure snake instantly transformed into mist, and then reformed into an azure-robed maiden. Even Autumn Leaf was shocked, and as for the nearby Bluestone, he actually jumped. "A monster! A Diremonster!"

“I’m a Wanxiang Diremonster! A peak Wanxiang Diremonster!”

Qingqing raised her head and spoke smugly.

“A Wanxiang Diremonster?” Bluestone blinked. Although Ning had originally left behind some pills and treasures for him, in terms of talent, Bluestone was somewhat inferior to even Autumn Leaf. Although Autumn Leaf had already become a Xiantian lifeform, Bluestone remained unable to break through, and was still at the Houtian stage. However, he knew about the major levels of Immortal cultivators.

“Peak Wanxiang? Our Patriarch of the Ji clan seems to only be a Zifu Disciple.” Bluestone looked towards the azure-robed maiden, unable to believe that this was someone who could easily crush the Patriarch of the Ji clan.

Ning laughed. “Little Qing was originally an Azure Skysnake who lived in the Swallow Mountains. Afterwards, fate brought us together in the wild marshes of the Gaol Mountains, and so she accompanied me and became my spirit-beast.”

“Your spirit-beast, Big Brother?” Bluestone let out a sigh of relief, then asked with curiosity, “Big Brother, are you at the peak Wanxiang level yet?” “Late Wanxiang level, a bit weaker than Little Qing,” Ning said.

“Although Master’s only at the late Wanxiang level, I’m far from being his match.” Qingqing lowered her head and said, “Master...he’s a real monster, even more of a monster than me.”

Autumn Leaf and Bluestone were both delighted and surprised. Autumn Leaf then looked at the Whitewater Hound behind Ning. “Uncle White, you...” “Uncle White is also at the late Wanxiang level,” Ning said.

“This...this...” Autumn Leaf instantly realized how, despite only a few years having passed, her young master had improved at an utterly astonishing rate.

The Whitewater Hound began to speak in the human tongue. “Monsters train much more slowly, and many monsters will take thousands of years to go from the Zifu level to the Wanxiang level, and tens of thousands of years to go from the Wanxiang level to the Primal level...although I

reached the necessary level of insights long ago, in terms of accumulated elemental ki, I had needed to accumulate much more. Fortunately, Ning helped me, and thus I very quickly reached the Wanxiang level.”

“Three Wanxiang experts.” Bluestone was full of delight and excitement. “The other powers of Swallow Mountain don’t even have a single Wanxiang Adept amongst their ranks, but our Ji clan has suddenly gained three. This is too...too...ahahaha, we’re going to be invincible!”

“The young master’s formidable, but you aren’t. He gave you excellent techniques, excellent masters, and various treasures and spirit-pills...but you still have yet to become a Xiantian lifeform. When the young master was your age, he was able to effortlessly kill Zifu Disciples,” Autumn Leaf scolded.

“How can I compare to Big Brother? In terms of cultivating, I can’t even compare to you, Big Sister Autumn Leaf,” Bluestone shook his head. Autumn Leaf scolded him angrily, “You don’t work hard, and you always make excuses for yourself.”

Seeing this, Ning actually felt a strong, warm feeling surge into his heart. It was just like before; Autumn Leaf also treated Bluestone as she would her own little brother.

Ji Ning had returned. The unparalleled genius, the disciple of Black-White College, Ji Ning. He had come back to Swallow Mountain. This news quickly stunned the entire Ji clan, and the members of the clan celebrated and danced for joy.

Soon, the likes of Patriarch Ji Ninefire, Ji Young, Ji Redflower, and the others, including the most outstanding youths the Ji clan had produced in recent years...they all made their way to Brightheart Island of Serpentwing Lake!

“This is a Wanxiang serpent monster?”

“The Whitewater Hound has become a Wanxiang Diremonster as well?”

The Patriarch and the others, upon arriving, were all astonished. They weren’t too surprised by the fact that Ning had become a Wanxiang

Adept, as Ji Ning had been able to easily slay the Wanxiang Adept, Xu Li, in the past. In addition, Ji Ning had entered the legendary Black-White College; in their hearts, for a monster like Ji Ning to improve so rapidly was perfectly normal. If he trained as slowly as they did, that would be quite surprising.

“Patriarch,” Ning said, “Recently, I joined the Raindragon Guard.” The nearby Ninefire, Granny Shadow, Ji Truekeep, and Young all revealed looks of surprise or delight on their normally calm faces. They didn’t know that Ning had recently joined the Raindragon Guard; however, they weren’t at all surprised by the fact that he was strong enough to join them.

“After joining the Raindragon Guard, I was granted the authority to designate a region of ten thousand kilometers to be protected by the Raindragon Guard! Even if I were to die in the future, this land would still be protected by the Raindragon Guard for a thousand years. The region I designated has the City of Ten Thousand Swords at the center, and the other four prefectural cities included within it as well.”

“Here’s the talisman.” Ning took out a talisman, then said, “Only Zifu Disciples can bind it. After doing so, hang it above the gates of the Lord Prefect’s residence at the City of Ten Thousand Swords. When you do so, the entire city’s walls will have a vague outline of a Raindragon appear. Others will instantly know that this place is under the protection of the Raindragon Guard, and they won’t dare to invade.”

Ninefire accepted the talisman with incomparable excitement. “This will be the foundation of our clan, the foundation of our clan! With this talisman, our clan’s base will be even more secure, and our Ji clan will definitely flourish and grow!” The nearby Truekeep and others were all filled with anticipation and eagerness as well.

“Ji Ning, how long will you remain, this time?” Ninefire asked. “In the future,” Ning said, “I’ll permanently live here at Serpentwing Lake. I’ll occasionally go out and take on some missions for the Raindragon Guard, and also occasionally pay a visit to my master at the Black-White College of Stillwater City. The rest of the time, I should be here.”

There were some students of the Black-White College who always stayed at the College. This was because the college had the Black-White Diagram, and because they could often discuss the Dao with their fellow disciples. Ning, however, was different. First of all, Immortal Diancai only occasionally provided guidance to him. As for the Black-White Diagram? It wasn't of too much benefit to Ning, as it would be enough for him to just go view it occasionally. This was because Ning had the underwater estate, which was even better. The Stellar Hall of the underwater estate was far more formidable than the Black-White Diagram.

Whether for the sake of the clan, or because of the underwater estate, or for the sake of the calmness of his own soul, Ning would choose to remain at Serpentwing Lake.

"Good. Good!" Ninefire, overjoyed, said hurriedly, "It won't affect your training, will it? No matter what, training as an Immortal is of paramount concern."

"It will not," Ning shook his head. "Good." Ninefire nodded repeatedly. "With you here long-term, Ji Ning, and with two Wanxiang Diremonsters...our Ji clan's power will grow exponentially. With this additional power, our Ji clan will flourish still further, and our territory will grow."

"Right. Three Wanxiang Adepts, and with Ning possibly being a Primal Daoist in the future! The territory our Ji clan has is too small." Granny Shadow, Ji Truekeep, and the others all began to grow excited. The larger one's stomach was, the more food one could eat. In the past, the Ji clan's power was limited, and so they naturally didn't dare to desire too much. But now that Ji Ning was so powerful, and now that he had two Wanxiang Diremonsters, and had the support of the Black-White College? Given their power, the Ji clan was naturally going to flourish.

"Do as you see fit." Ning agreed, because this had been his father's hope as well. "If you run into any trouble...Little Qing, Uncle White, the two of you need to give them a hand."

"Leave it to me," Qingqing said confidently. "Swallow Mountain only has

us three Wanxiang Adepts; doesn't that mean we'll be able to do whatever the hell we want?"

"Haha..." Ninefire and the others all began to roar with laughter.

Ji Ning's decision to stay at Serpentwing Lake sent excitement throughout the Ji clan. Ning also gave some guidance to some of the more promising new talents of the Ji clan. However, these so-called talents could only be considered talents in the Swallow Mountain region; none of them truly astonished Ning. Ning soon understood that the fellow disciples he usually interacted with were all members of the Black-White College...how could the 'geniuses' of a small clan such as the Ji clan compare with them?

Reuniting with his clan members. Providing guidance to his juniors. After three days, things at Brightheart Island finally calmed down. Only now did Ning enter his private study room.

"The underwater estate." With but a thought, Ning manifested an enormous phantom of a grizzly bear's head within his private room. The phantom bear had a hint of a smile on its face. Opening its mouth, it swallowed Ning into it.

Ning disappeared from the private room. He had returned to the 'underwater estate', located in a different dimension.

Chapter 16: Comprehending the Dao in the Stellar Hall

The large, ancient hall was the same as it had been in the past. Those giant prayer mats remained in the same positions as they had for trillions of years.

Ning materialized out of nowhere within this main hall. He instantly saw an old black bull and a giant yellow bear, and he hurriedly said with respect, “Ji Ning greets you two, seniors.”

“Late Wanxiang stage?” The giant yellow bear nodded slightly. “You’ve improved quite quickly as a Ki Refiner, but you have only reached the ninth stage as a Fiendgod. You are a bit slower.”

“Already at the Wanxiang level?” The old black bull was quite surprised. He looked at Ning. “Ji Ning, kiddo, it seems as though you are already much more powerful than our fourth master, Rampart. Rampart died at the Wanxiang level, you know.”

Ning just grinned. As for the giant yellow bear, he nodded. “Ji Ning is naturally much more powerful than Rampart; his talent is comparable to a reincarnated Immortal’s.”

“You praise me too much, senior,” Ning said with a laugh. Naturally, he felt quite pleased at being praised. “I wonder how much of a chance I would currently have at challenging the third level of the Wargod Hall?”

“Less than ten percent.” The giant yellow bear shook his head. “What?!” Ning was shocked. When he had left Swallow Mountain and gone to Stillwater City, he had already successfully passed the second level of the Wargod Hall. In the past four years, he had only grown more powerful as a Fiendgod Body Refiner, and had embarked on the path of the Dao of the Sword...and yet the spirit of the estate, the giant yellow bear, was actually saying with great certainty that he had less than a ten percent chance of passing the third level?

“Senior, you don’t even know what level I have reached in the sword,”

Ning protested. The giant yellow bear shook his head. “Ji Ning, you don’t understand. The first and second levels of the Wargod Hall, upon being completed, result in rewards of Mortal-ranked magic treasures or items of comparable value. But the third and fourth levels, when completed, will result in you acquiring Earth-ranked magic treasures or items of comparable value...in short, after every two levels of the Wargod Hall, the difficulty skyrockets.”

“Skyrockets?” Ning frowned.

“Right. The first and second levels of the Wargod Hall are generally meant to be a test for Fiendgods who have reached the Zifu level. The third and fourth levels, however, are meant for Fiendgods who have reached the Wanxiang level.” The giant yellow bear looked towards Ning. “Generally speaking, only when Fiendgods have reached the Wanxiang level will they have a chance at passing the third level of the Wargod Hall. You are only at the ninth stage of the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens]; your fundamentals are, by comparison, far too weak. Although you have divine abilities, the test has already accounted for them as well; these are tests meant for the heirs of Master, after all.”

“For example, the seventh and eighth levels of the Wargod Hall are meant to test Fiendgods who have reached the Void level of power. In the past, Immortal Juhua had remained unable to break through as a Fiendgod Body Refiner, and so although he did break through as a Ki Refiner, and he even reached the peak of the Void level as a Ki Refiner, he was still unable to pass the seventh level. Only after he trained for many years and became a Loose Immortal was he able to pass the seventh level...from this, you should be able to imagine how difficult it is.”

Ning nodded silently. Right. Immortal Juhua, even as a peak Void-level Ki Refiner, was unable to pass the seventh level. Thus, for a peak Wanxiang-level Ki Refiner to pass the third level would be similarly difficult. One had to have the finest Fiendgod Body Refining techniques, a high level of insight into the Dao, and a divine ability like the [Starseizing Hand], or one of the other top three divine abilities in the Divine Abilities Hall, in order to be able to pass it.

These were the trials left behind by Daoist Threelives!

"But of course, you can try if you want," the giant yellow bear said. "At the Zifu level, as a Fiendgod, you have two chances to challenge the Wargod Hall. You've only used one; you have one more!"

Ning laughed. "No rush. The main reason I've come is to go visit the Stellar Hall." The old black bull said hurriedly, "Let me take you there. The Wargod Hall is extremely difficult; in the past, it drove Immortal Juhua nearly insane. The Stellar Hall is much better; it is completely filled with the mysteries of the Dao, and is a sacred place for comprehending it."

The giant yellow bear followed them from behind. A bull, a man, and a bear. They walked together towards the Stellar Hall.

Within the Stellar Hall. The giant mountain remained there, filled with green, verdant life. Beneath that mountain, the stones remained strewn about wildly, with a thatched straw hut in the mist of them. The sky was still filled with those countless, sparkling stars.

"Each time I come, I have a different feeling." Ning looked towards the stream of water which flowed atop some of the rocks, then towards the wild grass that grew amidst them. He stared at the stars in the sky, each of which made him feel extremely aware of the profundity of the Dao. "That one is the Dao of the Inferno. That one is...the Dao of the Sword?"

Ning raised his head, giving it a look. "The Dao of the Sword?!" Ning couldn't help but let out a startled cry. The nearby old black bull gave him a surprised glance. "You've embarked onto the Dao of the Sword?"

Ning nodded. "Right. After leaving Swallow Mountain, I went to Stillwater City. Shortly after I entered the Black-White College, I embarked on the Dao of the Sword."

"In the past, Juhua embarked on the Dao of the Sword as well. Immortal Juhua was an extremely famous Sword Immortal...unfortunately, he wasn't able to completely comprehend the Dao of the Sword." The old black bull shook his head and sighed.

"The Dao of the Sword is one of the Grand Daos." The giant yellow bear walked towards them from behind, then said leisurely, "If you have the heart of a Sword Immortal, a heart which is sincere to the sword, and a high level of comprehension, you'll generally be able to embark on the Dao of the Sword."

Ning muttered to himself. It was easy for the bear to say that, but in the entire Black-White College, aside from his master, Ning was the only person to embark on the Dao of the Sword. It seemed, however, as though the bear viewed it as quite a simple matter. Still...the spirit of the estate had previously followed Daoist Threelives, a Primordial Fiendgod. It only made sense that he had a broader view of things.

"It's easy to embark on the Dao of the Sword, and it's also not too hard to be fairly accomplished in it. However, to comprehend the entire Dao of the Sword...that is incomparably difficult." The giant yellow bear looked towards Ning. "In your homeland, this world which has been unified by the Grand Xia Dynasty, there probably isn't a single person who has comprehended the entire Dao of the Sword!"

Ning was speechless. He continued to listen.

"Lesser Daos are lesser Daos. Grand Daos are Grand Daos. Heavenly Daos are Heavenly Daos!" The giant yellow bear let out a sigh. "The differences between the three are tremendous. Immortal Juhua had comprehended nine complete Dao-Paths, but even if you gave him another ten million years, he still wouldn't be able to completely comprehend a complete Grand Dao! My master, a Primordial Fiendgod, was born from the primordial chaos with innate mastery over an entire Grand Dao! Afterwards, he comprehended quite a few complete Grand Daos, and many ordinary Daos...but unfortunately, up till the day he built this estate, he still remained unable to master a Heavenly Dao."

Ning's ears pricked up. Daoist Threelives? He was born from the primordial chaos with innate mastery over a Grand Dao? And had mastered many Grand Daos?

"Slowly enlighten yourself. Your talent is far greater than Juhua's. Only

by comprehending a complete Grand Dao will you have a chance at becoming a major power who can roam freely about the Three Realms. Only then will you have a chance at becoming comparable to your master, Daoist Threelives.” The giant yellow bear looked towards Ning. “In this major world controlled by the Grand Xia Dynasty...you may become the very first person to completely comprehend the entirety of the Grand Dao of the Sword.”

Ning instantly felt his blood beginning to pump. Neither Immortal Northwalker nor the even more powerful Immortal Juhua had been able to even come close to mastering the complete Grand Dao of the Sword, despite the fact that they had travelled quite far along that path. And yet, they had already become incredibly powerful figures that had awed the entire Grand Xia Dynasty, and were even comparable to Celestial Immortals, despite only being Loose Immortals. If he were to truly master the complete Dao-Path of the Sword, then he would become a truly formidable figure in the Three Realms.

“My talent is greater than Immortal Juhua, and I have the divine ability, Starseizing Hand...my starting point is much higher than his as well.” Ning mused to himself, “And with the underwater estate assisting me... given all of my advantages, if I’m still unable to become a Sword Immortal who has completely mastered the Grand Dao of the Sword, I’ll have no one to blame but myself.”

Ning felt an incomparably heroic aura surge within his breast. Senior Northwalker? Immortal Juhua? He was going to become an even more powerful Sword Immortal, the most powerful Sword Immortal of the entire Grand Xia Dynasty! A Sword Immortal whose name would be known throughout the Three Realms!

“A nine-story tower is built on a foundation of earth. A journey of a thousand kilometers starts with the first step. I must move forward on my path, one step at a time.” Ning immediately moved towards the thatched hut, then pulled open a book. It was the [Stellar Scroll One], [Stellar Scroll Two], and so on...after placing these books on the stone table within the thatched cottage, Ning sat down on a stone bench. Opening the first

scroll, Ning began to read.

“Today, Chang Laijian came to me, asking me for help...” Ning read on, his enunciation of each character seemingly quite simple, but when spoken together, they linked in a way which was filled with the exquisite music of the great Dao. Naturally, this guided Ning’s heart to begin to enter a state where his subconscious began to focus even more on comprehending the Dao...

Ning’s eyes grew hooded as he stared towards the stars in the sky. Whoosh. A wind arose. Small winds began to stir in the nearby region. Ning stood up, then took a single step, and as he did, he seemed to become part of the wind, merging into it. He was like the flapping wings of a giant Roc, soaring about through the wind. With each movement, it was as though he was using an evasive, agility technique; he’d disappear in one place, then reappear somewhere else, where the wind had arisen. This...this was the true [Windwing Evasion].

“The Dao of the Gale.” The giant yellow bear nodded slightly. “He has reached the Dao Domain level in yet another Dao. It seems as though in the past four years, Ji Ning has improved considerably.”

During these past few years, Ning had accumulated many experiences and insights. All of them were now being drawn out by the Stellar Hall, and they began to burst forth.

Within the Black-White College in the distant Stillwater City, as Ning was reading the [Stellar Scrolls] and meditating on the Dao in the Stellar Hall.

“Senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning and I have both completed our Raindragon Guard missions. Senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning returned to his homeland, the Swallow Mountain region. For me to go there wouldn’t help me much in gaining insights into the Dao of Constructs, so I came back,” Northson said with a laugh. In front of him was senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus, dressed in a sky-blue robe.

Ninelotus laughed, then nodded. “You two junior apprentice-brothers truly are formidable. Both of you became Raindragon Guards in such a

short period of time. To this very day, I have not yet joined the Raindragon Guard.”

“Senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus, you have also reached the Wanxiang level. I imagine that you will soon become a Raindragon Guard,” Northson said.

“No rush. When I grow a bit more powerful, I’ll join the Raindragon Guard.” Ninelotus paused for a moment, then asked, “Right...when junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning returned to Swallow Mountain, did he tell you where he was going?”

Northson said, “Serpentwing Lake! Senior apprentice-brother said that in the future, he would be living there!”

“Oh, Serpentwing Lake!” Ninelotus nodded gently, silently memorizing this name, then laughed and rose to her feet. “I won’t bother you any further, junior apprentice-brother. I’ll go back now.” Ninelotus stepped onto a snowy white lotus-shaped magic treasure, then soared into the skies, flying far away.

While soaring through the skies, she had a hint of a smile in her eyes. “Serpentwing Lake of Swallow Mountain? Master also said that I’ve spent too much time in the College, and should go out and do some adventuring and broaden my horizons. Mmm. I’ll first go visit Serpentwing Lake.”

Two days later.

Ninelotus and her junior apprentice-sister departed from the Black-White College, heading out on an adventure. The first destination for the two of them was Serpentwing Lake of Swallow Mountain.

Chapter 17: The Third Stance of the [Three-Foot Sword]

The underwater estate. The Stellar Hall.

A wild gale howled within the skies of the Stellar Hall. Occasionally, flames would fill the skies, and occasionally, sheets of rain would fall. And Ning...he was the master of the wind and the storm, as though everything was under his command.

"A true genius." The giant yellow bear stood within the thatched cottage, staring off into the distance. He couldn't help but sigh, "In four short years, he's managed to improve this much."

"He is formidable." The old black bull's pair of ox-eyes were completely round as he stared. "As long as this kid doesn't screw up on his path and die somewhere, he will definitely be able to reach Immortal Juhua's level with ease."

The giant yellow bear gave a sidelong glance to the old black bull. "Stop praising your master. Your master, as an Earth Immortal, wasn't able to overcome the seventh level of the Wargod Hall...despite the assistance of the underwater estate, in the end, he still became a Loose Immortal. How can his talent be compared to Ji Ning's? Ji Ning, in terms of comprehension or temperament, is significantly superior to your master."

The old black bull let out an awkward laugh. "Look," he said hurriedly, "Ji Ning is now beginning to gain insights into the Dao of the Sword." The giant yellow bear turned to look over...

Ning stood there, amidst the strewn rocks. The wild gale, the torrential rain, the blazing inferno...it had all vanished. In the area around him, one surge of sword-ki after another began to emerge, visible to the naked eye. They began to wantonly swing through the area near Ning, and each stroke of sword-ki contained the profoundities of the Dao of the Sword, as they continuously put on display the insights Ning was gaining.

As for Ning himself, he remained staring at the star-studded skies,

focusing on one star in particular. This was the star that contained the complete Grand Dao of the Sword.

Previously, when Ning was comprehending the Dao, he had been like a blind man trying to build a mental image of an elephant by using his hands to feel it. He had advanced at a very slow pace, one step at a time... but now, within the Stellar Hall, which contained an entire, complete Dao-Path, it was as though a lamp had been lit within the darkness, allowing Ning to see where he was going. The accumulated experiences Ning had gained into the Dao of the Sword were beginning to burst forth...

"His ability to comprehend the Dao of the Sword is quite high," the old black bull breathed in surprise. "Ji Ning's ability to comprehend the Dao of the Sword has long surpassed the level of 'comprehending one's sword-heart'."

"Right. A bit a higher than I predicted." The giant yellow bear laughed, then said in praise, "It seems as though Master will finally have a true successor."

.....

Time passed, one minute at a time. The sword-ki around Ning became increasingly intricate and profound, and increasingly pure as well. The old black bull and the giant yellow bear, these two magic treasure spirits who had lived for unfathomably many years, watched leisurely as Ning continued to gain insights into the Dao. They watched for more than half a month.

"It truly is unfathomably profound." Ning suddenly let out a surprised sigh, and the sword-ki around him instantly, completely vanished.

"Finished?" The old black bull called to him. Ning turned to look, only to see the old black bull and the giant yellow bear within the thatched hut. He immediately nodded and sighed in amazement, "To be able to easily view and analyze the complete Dao of the Sword is the dream of any Sword Immortal. This time, when I viewed the entirety of the Grand Dao of the Sword, I finally understood...that even our Black-White College's

Immortal Northwalker's [Three-Foot Sword] only contained a small portion of the complete Grand Dao of the Sword. The path of Immortal cultivators truly is a long, winding one.

"Ji Ning." The giant yellow bear had a hint of a smile on his face. "What level has your swordplay reached? Show it to me."

"Please provide me with some guidance." Ning manifested a longsword of elemental ki in his hands. Calmly, he struck out with the sword, almost as though he were painting something. The sword danced in his hands, just like the brush of a master painter on a canvas; it was a very natural, relaxed movement of the sword.

"Swish!" The sword of elemental ki flashed outwards, and a faint sword tip suddenly appeared, leaving behind a sword-scar in the skies that could be seen with the visible eye, as though a painter's brush had left behind visible markings.

The third stance of the [Three-Foot Sword] – Sudden Sword Light!

"What a reserved sword. What a shocking sword." The giant yellow bear's eyes lit up, and he couldn't help but saying in praise, "The person who was able to develop this sword technique was truly a genius, most likely superior to even Juhua."

The old black bull instantly said, angry, "Big Brother, how can you say that he's superior to Juhua? My master was an extremely powerful Loose Immortal whose fame was well known throughout the lands under the control of the Grand Xia Dynasty."

Ning explained, "This sword technique is known as the [Three-Foot Sword], and it has a total of nine stances. Just now, I displayed the third stance, 'Sudden Sword Light', the most powerful sword technique I am currently capable of using. This sword technique was developed by the most powerful Sword Immortal in the history of the Black-White College, 'Immortal Northwalker'. He was a Loose Immortal who lived for more than a million years...but of course, in terms of longevity, he couldn't compare to senior Juhua."

"More than a million years?" The giant yellow bear stared at the old

black bull. “Black bull, this Immortal Northwalker was merely an Immortal of Stillwater Commandery, but he still became so accomplished. I wasn’t wrong in saying that he was more talented than Juhua, was I?”

“Hmph. Maybe he had even more monstrous luck than Juhua did,” the old black bull storted. The giant yellow bear stared at him. “You black bull...you are going to be pig-headed with me? So I have to lock you up for a few thousand years before you shape up?”

“Big Brother, we’re just debating with words, not violence!” The old black bull hurriedly took two steps back. Ning, seeing this, couldn’t help but secretly laugh. These two...

One was the spirit of Immortal Juhua’s Immortal-ranked magic treasure, while the other was the spirit of the estate which Daoist Threelives had forged. The two were both magic treasure spirits, and yet they could actually end up bickering like this?

“Big Brother, let’s not make a fool out of ourselves in front of Ji Ning. Am I right?” The old black bull hung its head. The giant yellow bear couldn’t even be bothered to look at the old black bull. He said directly to Ning, “Ji Ning, you have finished comprehending the Dao in the Stellar Hall...even if you spend more time here, it will be useless. You will need more normal, everyday experiences in the real world before you can gain more insights here! What do you plan to do next?”

“Senior,” Ning said. “If I were to go challenge the third level of the Stellar Hall, how are my chances now?”

“Now?” The giant yellow bear hesitated. “Your insights into the Dao of the Sword truly are at a higher level than I had anticipated. That that sword technique of yours, that...what was it...the ‘[Three-Foot Sword]’? It is quite formidable! Mm, and given that you have my master’s most powerful divine ability...you should have a 30% chance of overcoming the third level of the Wargod Hall.”

“Thirty percent?” Ning was secretly startled. The Dao of Rainwater, the Dao of the Inferno, the Dao of the Gale...he had improved significantly in

all three Daos. He had also made significant gains in the Dao of the Sword, and had comprehended the third stance of the [Three-Foot Sword]! Ning could sense that his power had increased dramatically! But he still only had a thirty percent chance?

“Are you going to challenge it?” The giant yellow bear asked. “Yes!” Ning nodded, not hesitating at all. “Eh?” The giant yellow bear was puzzled. “Why’ve you decided to challenge it? Aren’t you going to wait until you are a bit stronger and have a better shot?”

Ning shook his head. “I can sense that I will soon break through to the tenth stage of the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens]. Once I make the breakthrough, I will be at the Wanxiang level as a Fiendgod Body Refiner. By then, I’ll have two new chances to challenge the Wargod Hall, and the previous chance will have been wasted.”

As a Xiantian-level Fiendgod Body Refiner, Ning had two chances. He used the first to pass the first level of the Wargod Hall, and the second in a failed attempt at the second level.

As a Zifu-level Fiendgod Body Refiner, Ning had gained two additional options. He had only used one, to pass the second level of the Wargod Hall. If he didn’t use this second option...he would soon break through to the Wanxiang level, at which point it would be wasted.

“Let’s go,” the giant yellow bear said. “Follow me to the Wargod Hall.”

.....

As they exited the Stellar Hall, they moved through the winding corridor, soon arriving in front of the Wargod Hall. Ning pressed hand directly against the giant bronze door that was covered with a layer of bloody light . With a whoosh, that layer of bloody light devoured Ning, teleporting him away.

He was in a vast, endless world. The ground here seemed to be stained red with blood, and in the distance, a massive, towering edifice could be seen.

“Senior.” Ning saw that the giant yellow bear had appeared out of

nowhere, next to him. “The third level?” The giant yellow bear looked towards Ning. “Yes.” Ning nodded.

“Go, then!” The giant yellow bear pointed towards the distant tower. “Go in through the gates to that tower. You’ll be transported directly to the third level. Remember; if you realize that you have no hopes of winning, immediately use the talisman to teleport out. Your opponent won’t show any mercy; if you aren’t careful, you might die. That really wouldn’t be worth it.”

Ning nodded. Swoosh! Moving like a flash, he crossed the three hundred meters and arrived at the gates to the tower, glowing with a hazy white light. He took a step inside...and space twisted.

“The third level?” Ning stared at his surroundings. This was a blurry white room that was three thousand meters high and many thousands of meters in circumference. “What’s the trial here on the third floor?” The Darknorth Swords materialized into Ning’s hands as he carefully stared around.

Suddenly...

A ray of golden light shot out. It began to coalesce, quickly shaping into a golden-armored general. This golden-armored general had a cold, cruel look on his face, but his armor was incomparably beautiful. He had a pair of warhammers in his hands.

“Eh?” The golden-armored general looked around, then a hint of delight appeared on his face. Soon, his gaze fell upon Ning. Ning...felt his heart tremble.

Danger!

Danger!

His subconscious was frantically warning him that the golden-armored warrior in front of him was extremely terrifying. His soul had never been wrong before, and Ning instantly grew extremely cautious. “Didn’t the spirit of the estate say that I have a 30% chance of winning? 30% isn’t that bad...why is it that this golden-armored warrior gives me such a

terrifying sense of danger? Even ordinary Primal Daoists don't have such a terrifying presence."

"Little kid, you seem quite weak. The aura of your Fiendgod body isn't that strong." The golden-armored warrior looked weighingly at Ning. "Although I'm nothing more than an avatar created by a strand of divine power...beating you will be far too easy."

Divine power?

Avatar?

Ning new that Fiendgod Body Refiners had special powers at special levels. At the Zifu level, one would be capable of the Blood-Drop Rebirth ability. At the Wanxiang level, one would be able to change one's appearances and features. At the Primal level, one could separate part of their flesh and blood and form it into a clone, but the so-called 'clones' a Primal could create were not capable of independent movement; they had to move alongside the main body, and weren't independent.

In order to create an avatar through a strand of divine power, and one that was able to move about at that...this was definitely something only an extremely powerful Fiendgod was capable of!

"A Fiendgod?" Ning held his breath. "It must be a Fiendgod who is at least at the Void level. How could the avatar of a Fiendgod have been teleported here by the Wargod Hall?"

"What other secrets does this underwater estate hold? In the past, Immortal Juhua was capable of binding the estate and carrying it with him, but the old black bull said...that Immortal Juhua always had the feeling that there were other secrets hidden within it." Ning cursed inwardly, "Given that the avatar of a Fiendgod has appeared in the Wargod Hall, even an idiot would be able to guess that there are other secrets within the underwater estate."

Chapter 18: The Avatar of a Fiendgod

“Unfortunately, I have yet to truly be acknowledged by the spirit of the estate.” Ning understood this point. There were many secrets which the giant yellow bear refused to tell him. Instead, he had Ning go risk his life time and time again. If Ning truly were to die...then, it would be just like it had been for Immortal Juhua and Rampart. If he died, he died. The spirit of the estate would wait the next master. Even Daoist Threelives had stated that Ning would only be considered his disciple upon reaching the ‘Empyrean God’ level; clearly, Ning’s current level of power was far from being sufficient.

“It makes sense. The more powerful a person is, the more attention will be paid to him. Compared to the first time he met me, the spirit of the estate is being much nicer nowadays.” Ning remembered quite well that the first time he had met the giant yellow bear, the bear had paid him almost no attention.

These thoughts flashed through Ning’s mind, but he then immediately crushed them. This wasn’t the time to over-analyze them! What truly mattered right now was to defeat this Fiendgod avatar in front of him!

“I’ve heard that some powerful Fiendgods can create clones just by plucking hairs from their bodies.” Ning stared at the distant, golden-armored warrior, then said in a high voice, “However, in those legends, the power of those transformed hairs are extremely weak...I imagine that this avatar of yours is quite weak as well.”

The golden-armored warrior’s face changed slightly. Ning had cut straight to the heart of the matter; indeed, this avatar was simply formed from a strand of divine power, and even his ‘weapons’ were just formed from divine power. In terms of just comparing bodies, this avatar’s body was even weaker than Ning’s! However...his comprehension of the Dao was far too high.

“If my true body was here, a single breath from me would disintegrate you!” An arrogant look flashed through the golden-armored warrior’s

eyes. "Even though this is merely an extremely weak avatar, formed from a strand of divine power...against you...hmph!"

"Disintegrate me with a breath? It seems as though his true body is indeed extremely formidable. No wonder I had such a sense of danger earlier. That sense of danger from my subconscious must have originated from his true body," Ning mused to himself.

Ning spread out his divine will with a thought. Bang! His divine will poured out through the Soulshaker Seal, instantly surging forward in a tidal wave and crashing towards the soul of that golden-armored warrior.

BOOM. The tidal wave of divine will seemed to have crashed against an extremely unyielding rock; as it smashed against it, despite being powerful, it couldn't overcome the resilience of the rock.

"Haha, divine will?" The golden-armored warrior shook his head, saying with disdain, "Although the hint of my soul contained within this wisp of divine power is very weak, the quality of it is far greater than yours. Your divine will could be ten times stronger than it is now, and you still wouldn't be able to move me. Kid, use everything you have; later, don't blame me for not having given you a chance."

Although the golden-armored warrior appeared quite brash, in truth, he was pondering meticulously. This was because he, too, was both curious and cautious about this legendary place. "The legendary abode of the God-King...why have I been summoned to deal with a little child? He's so weak...where did this child come from, and what is his relationship with the God-King? His soul is fairly strong, though; he's not yet at the Primal level, but his soul is already this powerful."

Although he was powerful, compared to the legendary God-King, he was filled with dread and veneration. That one-armed God-King would most likely be able to annihilate him with a single glance.

.....

Ning felt that the golden-armored warrior was mysterious. But the golden-armored warrior also felt that Ning was similarly mysterious.

.....

"Actually, it would've been enough to have a golem fight against you." The giant yellow bear said to itself, amused, "But you are indeed someone with the potential to be the successor to Master, a person who will roam the Three Realms...and so, I might as well let you find a few things out in advance." By letting Ning touch a few secrets, it would actually help instigate Ning to work harder and desire to learn more.

"Quite powerful, eh? It's been a long, long time since I've interacted with those ancient, powerful presences as well." The giant yellow bear was also filled with desire. He had been alone for far, far too long.

.....

The third level of the Wargod Hall. Ning was rapidly considering his options. "He's a weak avatar of an extremely powerful figure. His strength lies in the fact that his insights into the Dao are very high, but his weakness is that he is only formed from a strand of divine power. Because it has been separated from his true body, it is like water that has been separated from its source; after using up divine power, there's no way to replenish it."

The Dao of combat required one to be able to use one's strengths to attack others' weaknesses.

"Exhaust his divine power!" Ning immediately began to move. Swoosh! He didn't charge directly forward. Instead, he rapidly retreated, while at the same time generating more than seven hundred flying swords in front of him. Late-stage Wanxiang elemental ki filled every single flying sword, and instantly, the flying swords began to undulate slightly. After having increased his comprehension of the Dao, it was now much easier for Ning to utilize the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation].

"The ninth level of the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation]." Ning formed an flying sword that seemed to be made of white jade in front of him. Swish! Swish! Swish! One white jade sword after another formed, then flew at high speed towards the golden-armored man.

"This sword formation is quite profound, but unfortunately, the user is

too weak.” The golden-armored warrior raised his two massive warhammers in an extremely leisurely manner, then strolled forward. With each step, however, he traversed many hundreds of meters, even faster than Ning using the Windwing Evasion.

“Waterflame Lotus.” Ning divided his mind, using half of it to control the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] and the other half to generate Waterflame Loti. One enormous Waterflame Lotus after another began to bloom, surrounding the golden-armored warrior and furiously seeking to impede his movements.

“This is troublesome.” The golden-armored warrior frowned. A warhammer in his hand swung out, instantly creating rippling cracks in space. The outer layer of the Waterflame Lotus it collided into immediately began to crack, then finally shattered apart.

“I only destroyed a single lotus?” The golden-armored warrior was secretly surprised. But swish! Swish! Swish! The jade-white swords flew out, moving like strokes of the brush on the canvas of the sky, all of them seeming quite plain, simple, and reserved, but causing the golden-armored warrior to feel exceptionally cautious. “The Dao of the Sword? And what a fierce, terrifying sword technique.”

Clank. The golden-armored warrior swung out with his massive warhammer, blocking one sword-flash after another. Each time he blocked one of Ning’s sword-flashes, the warhammer would tremble. This was because the warhammers were formed from divine power, and weren’t actual magic treasures.

Clank. Clank. Clank.

Faced with the Waterflame Lotus that was infused with dire-ice and earthfire, and the rays of sword-light from the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation], the golden-armored warrior was temporarily befuddled...

When roaming the wild marshes of the Gaol Mountains, the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] had been inferior to Ning’s close combat skills, but afterwards, at the Black-White College, Ning had trained all the way from the early Wanxiang stage to the late Wanxiang stage! The

rise in power of his elemental ki made it so that when Ning now used the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation], the power was two levels higher than it had been before. It was extremely close to Ning's close combat power by now.

"His avatar is clearly very weak, but he's still able to defend against all of my techniques." Ning's face turned cold, and the Darknorth Swords in his hands disappeared. Immediately afterwards, a black greatbow appeared in his hands.

This black greatbow was an Earth-ranked magic treasure. It could only be considered an ordinary item, and it didn't have any special, additional powers. It was quite hard for Ning to locate a legendary divine bow, but... this Earth-ranked greatbow was enough for Ning to display all of his power.

"[StarSeizing Hand]!" Ning instantly executed the [StarSeizing Hand], holding the grip of the bow with one hand and nocking the arrow and pulling the bowstring with the other...

Creaak. He pulled the bowstring to its maximum length. Ning's eyes seemed to spit lightning towards the distant figure. Pulling a bow didn't require much mental effort; it only used his divine power! This, Ning could pull the bow, control the Waterflame Loti, and the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] at the same time.

Swish! The arrow flashed out, instantly passing through the distance between them and arriving before the golden-armored warrior. "Not good." The golden-armored warrior was shocked ; this arrow was even faster than the sword-flashes sent out be that [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation]. He hurriedly moved to block.

Bang! The giant warhammer in his hands trembled so hard, it began to crack. It then quickly healed, but the golden-armored warrior had to take a few hurried steps back.

The power of an arrow...it came from accumulating strength, then letting it all explode forth from the arrow. The explosive power of an arrow was naturally even more powerful than Ning's close combat power.

However, the weakness of an arrow was its lack of agility; so long as enemies could dodge, the arrow would have been shot out for nothing.

But, Ning and the golden-armored warrior were only hundreds of meters away from each other! Given the speed of the arrows which Ning shot out while using the [Starseizing Hand], that distance would be passed in an instant. It was simply too fast! And the Waterflame Loti and the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] were also restricting and impeding the warrior's movements! Due to these reasons, the golden-armored warrior wasn't able to dodge at all, and had to rely on his own strength to block the arrows.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Each arrow carried a mountain-shattering force which burst forth with each collision. The nearby Waterflame Loti of dire-ice and earthfire, along with the late-stage Wanxiang-level [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] sword-flashes were hard to deal with as well. For a time, the golden-armored warrior found it incredibly hard to cope, and his divine power was rapidly depleting.

"If this continues, my divine power is going to be used up. After this avatar of mine uses up its divine power, it's going to dissipate." The golden-armored warrior couldn't hesitate any longer.

"RAAAARGH!" The golden-armored warriors suddenly let out an explosive shout. His entire body suddenly radiated a powerful golden light, and the warhammers in his hands transformed into streaks of light, shattering the nearby sword-flashes of the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] as well as the Waterflame Loti as he charged straight towards Ning.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

Ning shot out four arrows in a row! These arrows were all under the control of Ning's divine will, and they were even able to slightly curve in midair, attacking the golden-armored warrior in unison. There was no way the golden-armored warrior could avoid the joint attack of these four arrows; all he could do was hurriedly block, and in doing so, he was immediately knocked backwards.

The Waterflame Loti and the sword-flashes of the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] once more formed and moved to entangle him...

One arrow after another, each containing astonishing, savage power. They all swept towards him! These arrows guided by divine will moved in eerie, unfathomably strange ways. Now only were the arrows too powerful...the divine will caused them to adjust in minute ways.

"You little rascal, do you dare fight me in close combat?" The golden-armored warrior bellowed.

"You lose." Ning just replied in a soft voice as he shot out four more arrows simultaneously. The golden-armored warrior was barely able to block them, but then his entire body began to tremble, then collapsed and vanished into the void. As his body vanished, he growled in anger, clearly quite dissatisfied.

"Whew." Ning let out a sigh. "This was a mere avatar of the Fiendgod, but he was already quite difficult to deal with. I had to use the [Starseizing Hand] eighteen times in a row, and 39 attacks with my [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation]." Ning could sense that his divine power had been enormously depleted, as well as much of his elemental ki, and he couldn't help but feel secretly amazed.

Whoosh. Ning disappeared into thin air. By the time the world grew clear, Ning found himself within the main hall of the underwater estate again.

"...you actually used the bow to win?" The giant yellow bear stared at Ning, disbelief in his eyes. He had expected that this would be an extremely difficult battle; the two would've fought savagely in close combat, and in the end, Ning stood a high chance of losing.

But in the end...Ning had annihilated his foe by using the [Starseizing Hand] to shoot arrows at him from far away.

"The divine ability which Master transmitted to me, aside from being used in close combat, can also be used to attack others with the bow," Ning said meekly. "I was lucky enough to win."

“Lucky?” The giant yellow bear saw through Ning’s meekness and saw the smugness underneath. “Fine, fine. You defeated the third level, and you can go choose an Earth-ranked magic treasure or item of equivalent value. Go!”

Chapter 19: Nethercold

The Treasures Hall was the same as it had always been. Hanging in the air at the top of the hall were many powerful magic treasures and curious artifacts, all emanating powerful ripples...if it weren't for the fact that they were separated from the bottom by restrictive spells, those powerful ripples would easily annihilate Ji Ning if he were to interact with them! Ning felt no doubt about this whatsoever.

The giant yellow bear and Ning were within the Treasures Hall. "Ji Ning, you may now begin to select Earth-ranked magic treasures from the Treasures Hall," the giant yellow bear said, looking at Ning. "You must be even more careful than in the past, when you chose a Mortal-ranked magic treasure. This is because although you moved quite quickly from the Zifu level to the Wanxiang level, you will most likely take far more time to move to the Primal level. As for going from the Primal level to the Void level, the amount of time that will consume is even greater."

Ning nodded. The farther along the path one went, the longer it would take to reach the next stage.

"The same is true as well in selecting magic treasures." The giant yellow bear said, "It is guaranteed that you will only be using Mortal-ranked magic treasures for a short period of time; the three that you chose previously, for example, are most likely already of limited use to you."

Ning chuckled. Of the three he had chosen, he had sold off the Netherwyrm Heavenlock Formation at Stillwater City's Carefree Caverns long ago! As for the Nine Yang Swords Formation, he had replaced them with the superior Northriver Sword Formation which he had acquired at the wild marshes of the Gaol Mountains.

Only the Evanescence Demonslayer Sword, which he could use for sneak attacks, was still being regularly used. However...this sword had its flaws at all. It was most suited for underground sneak attacks; in other situations, such as when battling in midair in the wild marshes of the Gaol Mountains, as soon as it moved close to the enemy, it would be

easily discovered, at which point in time it could no longer used for a sneak attack.

“You’ve passed through the third level of the Wargod Hall, and soon, you’ll be able to overcome the fourth level. Once your Fiendgod body reaches the Wanxiang level...you’ll have had a total of three chances to obtain Earth-ranked magic treasures, or artifacts of an equivalent value.” The giant yellow bear looked at Ning. “Choose carefully. Some of the top-grade magic artifacts present are most likely only owned by the most powerful of organizations in this major world of the Grand Xia Dynasty’s. It will be incredibly difficult to purchase or trade for them.”

Ning nodded. There were very few top-grade Mortal-ranked magic treasures, and top-grade Earth-ranked treasures were even more incomparably rare. They were almost never seen, and to find one suitable for one’s self was even less likely. He, however, now had a chance to choose amongst the top-grade Earth-ranked magic treasures of the underwater estate for one he liked.

“Choose.” The giant yellow bear produced a golden book out of nowhere, and the book was covered with two Fiendgod characters for ‘Precious Treasures’.

“Why is it that this book looks identical to the Mortal-ranked magic treasures book?” Ning couldn’t help but ask this question. The giant yellow bear looked at Ning. “Not just Earth-ranked; the Heaven-ranked, Immortal-ranked, and Pure Yang-ranked magic treasures book are the same as well, because I personally compile these books. This is your first time choosing an Earth-ranked magic treasure, and so I will only show you a portion of the items available. The second time, you’ll have more options, and the third time, you’ll be able to go through any of the items in the book.”

Ning asked hurriedly, “Senior, which is the most suited to me?” The treasures to be chosen from were simply too dazzling. Only the giant yellow bear would know which were the best. Last time, for example, the giant yellow bear had advised him to choose the Nine Yang Sword Formation, and the third time, he had indeed chosen it.

"There are plenty of precious artifacts, quite a few of which are suited to you," the giant yellow bear said. "I think you should read through it slowly." Resigned, Ning began to flip through the book.

"Wow, this really is...!" Ning's gaze instantly grew heated. He had gone to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain before, and had seen the Earth-ranked magic treasures there, and had also seen some Earth-ranked treasures that were only for display and not for sale; these were some of the most precious, top-quality magic treasures of that local branch of the Heavenly Treasures Mountain. Without having a few treasures like this to display, how could the Heavenly Treasures Mountain awe the masses? But Ning couldn't help but think to himself, "All of these treasures are comparable to those items at the Heavenly Treasures Mountain. His heartrate sped up.

Xuanwu's Goldscale Ship; a top-grade Earth-ranked flying treasure. While flying, it could transform into a goldscale fish that could soar into the heavens or burrow into the ground. It was incomparably quick when flying, and was as incomparably nimble in the skies as a fish was in the water. Upon entering the ground, it would become even more agile, comparable to many Heaven-ranked flying treasures.

In addition, given that it was named after Xuanwu, the Black Tortoise, it was also incomparably sturdy. When hiding within the Xuanwu Goldscale Ship, even a Primal Daoist's attacks would find it difficult to do anything to it.

"What an item," Ning murmured to himself. "In the Heavenly Treasures Mountain, I saw an item on display, the 'Ruyi Godspeed Boat', which was comparable to this item in speed but far weaker in defense. And yet, that was enough for it to be considered one of their not-for-sale items."

It was indeed an excellent item. However, since it was guaranteed that Ning would at most have three chances to choose Earth-ranked magic treasures, he wasn't willing to waste one of the three chances on a flying magic treasure.

Earthfire Heartlamp, a strange artifact. The Earthfire Heartlamp was a

unique sort of rock that was formed from the natural world. It was naturally formed into the shape of the lamp, and within it there was something akin to the extracted essence of fire...this extract was incomparably, shockingly effective in nurturing earthfire, and if Ning were to often place his earthfire within it and absorb from that essence, in ten short years, his earthfire would rise to be of the first grade! If other types of supportive treasures were used, the amount of time it would take for earthfire to be nourished to the first rank would be even less.

"Earthfire Heartlamp!" Ning was truly intrigued. Although many of the previous items had caused his heartrate to speed up, this was the first time he was truly filled with a powerful urge. "This is what I'll choose, I imagine."

"Should I choose it?" Ning began to ponder. "Earthfire, at the first grade, is capable of threatening even Primal Daoists. But this will take roughly ten years." Ning thought about it, shaking his head in the end. "In ten years, my [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens] will probably have increased dramatically in power, and my swordplay as well; earthfire of the first grade won't be as helpful then as it would be now."

It had only been four years since he had joined the Black-White College! And yet, he had already developed the third stance of the [Three-Foot Sword]! He had truly improved tremendously during the past four years. Ten years ago, he had been fighting with the Azure Skysnake, and had just arrived at the Eastmount Marshes after having left West Prefecture City. Now, ten years later, he was capable of effortlessly killing Wanxiang Adepts.

Although it was true that the further along one went, the slower one improved, ten years...Ning felt confident that he would improve dramatically in this period of time.

"It's very good item." Ning pondered a bit more. "However, it's guaranteed that the goldflame earthfire will never be my most powerful attack; in addition, my body has both earthfire and dire-ice. When using the Waterflame Lotus, ideally, the dire-ice and earthfire should be balanced. If the earthfire is too powerful or the dire-ice too weak, that

will not be good for my Waterflame Lotus.

"Even without this Earthfire Heartlamp, I'll still have the ancient glacial ice, the firelotus pith, and other treasures. Although they are a bit slower, and will only be able to improve my earthfire and dire-ice to the fourth or fifth grade, at least the power will be matched." Ning persuaded himself to forget it, then began to continue reading.

One magic treasure after another. In the past, any Earth-ranked magic treasures were very alluring, but that was before Ning had truly gone out adventuring. Now that he was a disciple of the Black-White College, a Raindragon Guard, and had visited the Heavenly Treasures Mountain...his horizons had been broaded, and only now did he understand how precious and rare the priceless items which Daoist Threelives had left behind were. Most likely, not even the treasures of the entire Grand Xia Dynasty were comparable to the items here. Unfortunately, he was only allowed to choose three items from each level.

The Brocade-Cloud Miasma, a top-grade Earth-ranked protective item...

A Hundred Venoms Immortal-Lock Formation...an Earth-ranked formation...

A Dire-Ice Mirror...a precious item capable of improving dire-ice to the first grade in ten years.

One precious item after another. Ning's eyes were turning red from desire. "Senior, you should treat the Dire-Ice Mirror and the Earthfire Heartlamp as one treasure," Ning said, raising his head to look at the giant yellow bear. "If you did, I'd pick it."

"As one treasure?" The giant yellow bear stared at him. "Are you not aware that many different types of earthfire and dire-ice are only capable of being improved to the third or second grades? Although some have the potential to be improved to the first grade, that's just potential! How hard would it be for one to truly improve it to the first grade? Upon doing so, once it is further upgraded to skyfire, its potential and its power will become even greater. Are you aware of all this? I refuse to believe that in the entirety of the Grand Xia Dynasty, you'll be able to find a single place

which is willing to sell Earthfire Heartlamps or Dire-Ice Mirrors to outsiders!"

Ning was speechless. Sell it to outsiders? In the Heavenly Treasures Mountain and the Carefree Caverns, he truly had never seen these items for sale before.

These rare artifacts were all formed naturally by the natural world, and were not magic treasures which would be created or forged. Thus, there was a very limited number of them in the world. Given that there were thousands of Heavenly Treasures Mountains, one in each commandery, how could they possibly sell Earthfire Heartlamps to outsiders?

"The only reason I brought out the Earthfire Heartlamp and Dire-Ice Mirror out for your first selection is because I saw that you, kid, have dire-ice and earthfire in your body." The giant yellow bear looked at Ning. "I'm taking special care of you, which is why I expanded the range of choices a bit. To tell you the truth, there are three items that are the most suited for you in this selection."

"The Earthfire Heartlamp and the Dire-Ice Mirror are two of them. There is a third, however, on the third to last page." As soon as the giant yellow bear's words came out, Ning immediately flipped to the third to the last page, looking at it carefully.

The Nethercold Sword Formation. The Nethercold Sword Formation was made up of nine top-grade Earth-ranked flying swords, each of which was made from an extremely precious material known as the nethercold lunar metal.

"All nine are top-grade Earth-ranked flying swords?" Ning was so shocked, his eyes bulged out. These so-called 'top-grade' items were not graded by the Heavenly Treasures Mountain; they were graded by Daoist Threelives!

These were on completely different levels; Daoist Threelives was far more strict in grading these magic treasures. There were some items he had left behind, such as the Nine Yang Swords Formation which Ning had chosen previously, which he had ranked as nine high-grade items, but

which the Heavenly Treasures Mountain would rank as nine top-grade items!

“How can all nine be top-grade Earth-ranked swords?” Ning stared in shock at the giant yellow bear.

“Originally, I planned on separating the nine of them and just putting in a record for a ‘Nethercold Sword, a top-grade Earth-ranked flying sword’.” The giant yellow bear shook his head. “But afterwards, I reconsidered; if I were to split them apart, I would probably go through dozens or even hundreds of masters without any of them choosing a Nethercold Sword. So, I decided I might as well list them here together, as a sword formation. Because these nine swords form a complete sword formation... logically speaking, I shouldn’t have shown it to you until your third selection. However, I don’t want for you to die early on in the outside world, kid. So, I decided to just forget it, and let you see it in advance.”

“Earthfire Heartlamp, Dire-Ice Mirror, Nethercold Sword Formation. These are the most suited for you.” The giant yellow bear looked at Ning. “Choose.”

Chapter 20: Senior Apprentice-Sister Ninelotus

Ji Ning hesitated. Which to choose?

“Senior.” Ning hurriedly, deferentially asked, “Given that when my Fiendgod body reaches the Wanxiang level, I’ll have another chance to acquire an Earth-ranked magic treasure after overcoming the fourth level of the Wargod Hall...will I have the chance to acquire even better magic treasures at that time?”

“Of course!” The giant yellow bear said confidently, “Items better than the Earthfire Heartlamp, the Dire-Ice Mirror, and the Nethercold Sword Formation...there will be more than one that is better than these three! You’ve merely overcome the third level of the Wargod Hall; how can I possibly bring out the very best Earth-ranked magic treasures right away? When I bring those out, you won’t choose the likes of the Earthfire Heartlamp.”

“Hurry up and choose. In the end, there will be countless treasures, but unfortunately, I can’t give them all to you.” The giant yellow bear looked at Ning. “Master left behind many treasures, but not for just any single successor. In the event of your death, I need to ensure that the next successor has some treasures as well, yes?”

Ning pursed his lips. What a doleful thing to say! Die? Ning absolutely didn’t wish to fail, after having embarked on the Immortal path.

“This is my choice.” Ning flipped through the book to the third to last page, the one mentioning the Nethercold Sword Formation.

“I really do want the Earthfire Heartlamp and the Dire-Ice Mirror,” Ning sighed to himself. “However, they aren’t able to increase my power right away, but the Nethercold Sword Formation can! These nine Nethercold Swords in the formation are all top-grade, and it was Daoist Threelives who was the appraiser; their power must be superior to that of ordinary Heaven-ranked flying swords. They’ll be able to increase the power of my

[Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] to a whole new level!"

The higher one's level of power became, the more difficult it was to further strengthen one's self. To rise by a full level was incomparably difficult, but these Nethercold Swords were simply too powerful.

If he were to go and try to purchase them at the Heavenly Treasures Mountain, their price would surpass that of an ordinary Heaven-ranked flying sword. And, given their rarity, they would probably at least five thousand kilograms per sword! With all nine top-grade flying swords having come from the same source...the entire set would definitely go for at least fifty thousand kilograms of liquefied elemental essence. Fifty thousand kilograms? That was enough to make even a Primal Daoist turn green in envy. Even when Ning had been lucky enough to loot the corpse of the Dragonwhale King, he hadn't reaped such a fortune.

"The power of the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] depends entirely on the powerful flying swords comprising it! This is completely indisputable! Fortunately, I have the Treasures Hall," Ning mused to himself. "In turn, only in my hands can this [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] unleash its true, terrifying power."

The more powerful the swords used, the more monstrous and heaven-defying these swords were. In the past, the Thousand Swords Immortal had grown tremendously famous with this technique, but in the end, he had still fallen to Immortal Juhua. Given that Ning had the Treasure Hall behind him...the power of his [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] would be even more incomparably shocking.

"Come." The giant yellow bear beckoned towards the distance. In the void above, a point of light suddenly flashed and started to descend. It quickly passed through the restrictive spells, arriving next to Ning. It was nine completely black flying swords. Although they were completely black, they had a very soft, luxuriant gleam to them; it was almost as though a faint, extremely dark green luster covered these flying swords. They were so beautiful that they could be considered a work of art.

"They are perfect." Ning couldn't help but let out a sigh of praise.

Reaching out with this elemental ki, he sent one strand after another of watery-blue ki forward, swirling around the nine Nethercold Swords and easily binding them. With but a thought, Ning sent them swirling around him like nine shining stars.

"They are comparable to Heaven-ranked magic treasures in power," Ning said in praise. Heaven-ranked magic treasures were only usable by Primal Daoists, but his magic treasures were also at this level of power... this was why they were considered top-grade treasures. And he had nine of them!

"Most likely, they would be enough to cause even Primal Daoists to grow envious and kill me for them," Ning said with a soft laugh. The giant yellow bear replied, "If they don't bind them personally, it'll be hard for them to tell just by looking at them that these are top-grade."

"What fine treasures." The more Ning thought about them, the happier he became.

"Time to go. If you want more treasures, go back and train hard," the giant yellow bear urged. Ning nodded. Instantly, a phantom of a giant bear's head appeared, swallowing Ning with a single gulp.

.....

Serpentwing Lake. Brightheart Island. Soon, everyone on the island knew that after half a month, Ji Ning had left from his secluded meditation.

Aside from Ning, no one else knew of the existence of the underwater estate. Given that Ning's training room was a place where others were strictly forbidden from trespassing, everyone had assumed that he had been in the room training this entire time.

"Master, Master!" An azure-robed maiden was the first to suddenly appear at the entrance of the room. Ning walked out of it, raising his head to look towards the outside. A cold wind pressed down upon him, and giant plumes of snow were falling down from the skies.

"Master, why is it that after you went into training, I could no longer

sense your presence?” The azure-robed maiden stared at Ning, mentally sending to him with franticness, “I felt as though you were very, very far away. I’m your spirit-beast, and our spirit-bond was not dispersed, so I knew that you weren’t dead, but...if you weren’t dead, why couldn’t I sense you?”

The nearby Whitewater Hound walked over, sending mentally, “Ning, son, when you went into training, this Azure Skysnake wanted to go inside to search for you. I had to stop her.”

“Oh.” Ning laughed. The first time he had entered the underwater estate, he had caused his father and mother to be concerned over him. They all knew that he had entered a special, ancient relic site, and naturally, Uncle White had learned this as well.

“I had a stroke of karmic luck,” Ning said. “Luck?” Qingqing was surprised. The Grand Xia Dynasty’s territory was simply too vast and contained far too many secrets; anything was possible within it. For example, someone might be in the middle of a perfectly normal battle when an ancient Fiendgod might suddenly wake up and intervene. If this could happen, what couldn’t?

Qingqing could tell that Ning didn’t want to discuss this in detail, so she just muttered to herself, “So stingy with your secrets.”

Ning laughed. The underwater estate involved Daoist Threelives, and it was so important as to be able to shock the entire Three Realms! How could Ning casually reveal its secrets to others? For example, although he was now the master of the underwater estate, he was the only one who could enter it; others couldn’t not. Thus, Ning hadn’t even told his parents; after all, given that his parents couldn’t enter it, letting them know of it would only prove problematic, not beneficial in any way.

“Young master.” Autumn Leaf walked towards them from afar, face covered in smiles. “You’ve left your secluded meditation. During this period of time, young master Ji Mo came. He wished to ask for your instructions, young master.”

“Ji Mo?” Ning nodded. “During those first three days after my return, he

hadn't come." Ji Mo was, aside from Ning himself, the most talented member of the younger generation of the Ji clan.

"Young master Ji Mo was adventuring and testing himself in the outside world as well," Autumn Leaf said. "Thus, when you returned, the Patriarch sent people out to find young master Jji Mo. They spent quite a few days before finding him, and afterwards, young master Ji Mo came by himself, arriving on the ninth day of your secluded meditation."

Smiling, Ning nodded. Suddenly, another figure appeared in the distance. In but two flashes, the figure appeared close to them; it was a tall, sturdy-looking handsome youth with a pair of sword-shaped eyebrows. He stared towards Ning with a blazingly eager gaze, and he immediately said with respect, "I pay my respects to you, young master Ji Ning."

"It seems as though you've improved quite a bit in recent years," Ning said with a praising laugh. With but a single glance, he could tell that Ji Mo's aura had changed significantly. In the past, Ji Mo had been quite reserved, but now, Ji Mo seemed like a drawn warblade. He had a powerful, sturdy willpower that was forged through battle.

"Compared to you, young master, I'm still quite inferior," Ji Mo said respectfully.

"If you are willing," Ning suddenly said, "You can come here and stay here whenever you please." Ji Mo was stunned. Instantly, he revealed a look of joy on his face. In the past, he had knelt down to beg Ji Ning to accept him as disciple, but at that time, Ning was focused on his own pursuit of the Dao, and didn't have any time to spare. Now that Ning had chosen to permanently stay here at Serpentwing Lake...he was naturally willing to occasionally make the time to provide some guidance to the most talented younger members of the Ji clan. This could be considered a way in which he would help the Ji clan train future experts.

Suddenly...

"Is junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning present?" A very familiar voice rang out, echoing throughout the entire Serpentwing Lake.

“Junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning?”

“Someone who addresses our young master as ‘junior apprentice-brother’?” Autumn Leaf revealed a look of amazement.

“Someone who is addressing the island master as junior apprentice-brother?” The many maids and servants who lived on Brightheart Island all revealed looks of amazement. The ‘island master’ was, of course, the master of Brightheart Island, Ji Ning.

“Junior apprentice-brother?”

Instantly, everyone in the Serpentwing Lake area was puzzled and curious. Only a very few of them knew that Ning had joined the Black-White College, and they were able to guess at the truth: “Most likely, a member of the Black-White College has come.”

Upon hearing this voice, Ning also lifted his head in surprise, staring towards the source of the voice. A masted ship soared towards them from the distance, with two beautiful, indistinct figures atop it.

“Ning, son, it seems to be two of your senior apprentice-sisters,” the Whitewater Hound send. “You really are formidable. As soon as you came back, you managed to get two of your senior apprentice-sisters to chase after you all the way here.”

Ning stared at Uncle White. “They are just passing through and paying their respects.” Uncle White just snickered.

Ning lifted his head, staring towards the distant ship. He said softly, “But it really is a coincidence. As soon as I left my seclusion, they arrived.”

Swoosh. Ning immediately flew into the skies to go greet them. “Senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus, senior apprentice-sister Qingqing.” In the skies above Serpentwing Lake were the blue-robed Ninelotus and the silver-robed Qingqing. They, too, flew over.

“We learned from junior apprentice-brother Twinwood that you, junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, were living here,” Ninelotus laughed. “We are out adventuring and just so happened to go past Swallow Mountain, so we

decided to come and pay a visit. Junior apprentice-brother, you really have quite the eye; you actually chose such a beautiful place! This vast Serpentwing Lake, and that island in the center of the lake; they are all quite lovely.”

Ning turned to look. Indeed; light rippled off the waves, which appeared as beautiful as jade, and the countless flowers and grassy areas on the central island, along with the various pavilions, made it look like a true utopia, a peach garden beyond the mortal world.

“Senior apprentice-sister, you don’t know this, but this used to be the territory of a monster,” Ning said with a laugh. “Afterwards, I eradicated that monster, and our Ji clan arranged for quite a few people to spend a long period of time renovating the place. Only then was the previously monster-infested island changed to its current appearance. My two senior apprentice-sisters, let’s not chat in the air. Come, let me show you around my island and show you some hospitality.”

“Let’s go.”

Ninelotus and Qingqing, along with Ji Ning, immediately flew down. The mortal maids of Brightheart Island all murmured to themselves, “Wow...as Immortal fairies!”

“They are flying.”

“They are so beautiful.”

“Goddesses!”

All of the mortals were extremely excited.

Ning’s group of three quickly descended. The Azure Skysnake and the Whitewater Hound came over at this time as well. “These two Diremonsters are the ones which junior apprentice-brother Twinwood spoke of, right? The Azure Skysnake, ‘Qingqing’, and the Whitewater Hound, ‘Uncle White’?” Ninelotus laughed.

“What?! Qingqing!?” The nearby, silver-robed maiden instantly stared.

“Right, Qingqing, she’s also named Qingqing.” Ninelotus choked back a

laugh. She had been waiting, a long, long time to say these words; she had been eagerly anticipating the meeting between these two Qingqings.

Chapter 21: Life With Ninelotus

“My name is Luo Qing.” The silver-robed maiden stared at the Azure Skysnake.

The Azure Skysnake replied, “My name is Ji Qingqing.”

And then, they began to laugh and chat amongst themselves. These two ‘Qingqings’ grew quite close to each other. From this day forward, Ninelotus and Luo Qing began to temporarily live at Brightheart Island.

Only at nightfall did the snowfall come to a halt. In the sword-training terrace of Brightheart Island.

“Young master.” Ji Mo was incomparably respectful, and his eyes were filled with anticipation and eagerness. “Please provide me with some guidance.”

Ning stood with hands clasped behind his back, not too far away. With but a thought, he instantly created multiple waterflame swords out of nowhere through his elemental ki. These waterflame swords were incomparably fierce, and they began to swirl around Ji Mo. Ji Mo’s face changed...although Ning had merely activated the power of the natural world, it was still enough to cause a Xiantian lifeform to be in tremendous danger.

“Condense.” Ning’s eyes flashed as he looked at the manifestations of sword-ki. The many waterflame swords in midair quickly condensed into a single, massive lotus of sword-ki that was many tens of meters in diameter. The sword-ki had formed into a blooming lotus which had completely surrounded Ji Mo.

“Ji Mo,” Ning said. “This lotus of sword-ki contains some elementary tricks and knacks of the sword. There are a total of ninety one lotus petals that are revolving around you, each of which has a different type of sword-ki...what you need to do is destroy all of the lotus petals. Only after you destroy all of the lotus petals can you be said to have truly gained a basic level of expertise in the sword.”

“Can it be that I can’t be said to have reached even a basic level of expertise? But I reached the ‘one with the world’ level long ago,” Ji Mo couldn’t refrain from saying.

“You haven’t even gained a hint of the True Meaning of the Dao; how can you be considered to have reached a basic level of expertise?” Ning shook his head, then sat down nearby, leisurely pouring himself a cup of wine. While drinking some of this wine that Autumn Leaf had specially prepared, he pondered on the fourth stance of the [Three-Foot Sword].

Right at this moment...

“Junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning.” From afar, a woman walked over; it was Ninelotus and Luo Qing. In terms of appearance, they were absolutely the most beautiful women here at Brightheart Lake, and in terms of aura? They were disciples of the Black-White College! Luo Qing’s aura was quite unique, while Ninelotus was an incomparably dazzling figure even within the Black-White College who had drawn quite a few suitors.

Ning turned to glance at them, then hurriedly rose to his feet. “Senior apprentice-sisters Ninelotus and Luo Qing.”

“You are training your clan members?” Ninelotus glanced with interest towards the enormous lotus of sword-ki, as well as Ji Mo, who was striving to attack the lotus petals from the center of the lotus.

“A lotus?” The nearby Luo Qing laughed in surprise. “You were actually able to form a lotus of sword-ki by activating the energy of nature. It seems as though you are quite formidable in the mysteries of the lotus, junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning.”

Ning shook his head. “I just learned a few things and developed a protective technique, the Waterflame Lotus...which is why I have a few simple insights into the lotus.”

The lotus flower...its very existence was filled with countless mysteries. In the Three Realms, there were many major powers who would seat themselves on thrones of lotus flowers, or have protective lotus-treasures, or use lotus-related techniques.

"Senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus has comprehended many things pertaining to the lotus as well," Luo Qing hurriedly said. Ninelotus shook her head. "A bit less than junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning," she said.

"Artificial modesty!" Luo Qing frowned, then let out a smirk. "In terms of swordplay, it's true that you cannot compare to junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, but in terms of the lotus...senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus, you were born into the Dongyan clan, which is referred to as the Freshlotus Tribe ...and the secret manual which brought your tribe to prominence is the 'Fresh Lotus Manual'! In terms of the lotus, I imagine that none of us third-generation disciples of the Black-White College can compare to you."

Ning looked towards Ninelotus in surprise. The Dongyan clan? He had read various intelligence reports regarding the major powers of the Stillwater Commandery region. The Dongyan clan was an extremely powerful clan. Although it wasn't ranked amongst the eight major powers of Stillwater Commandery, the actual power of the Dongyan clan was actually superior to the likes of the Black-White College, the Skysplitter Sword Sect, the Eastriver clan, the Dragonhunter clan, and the other four! This was because the Dongyan clan's roots were actually in another place, the Highwater Commandery.

The Dongyan clan's roots were from the Highwater Commandery, but they were located in multiple other commandery cities. It could be said that the Dongyan clan stretched across three entire commanderies! It was a truly ancient and powerful clan. It was only because it was generally considered a power of the Highwater Commandery that it was not ranked amongst the eight great powers of Stillwater Commandery. But in terms of total power, in Stillwater Commandery, most likely only the Northmont clan or the local Raindragon Guards surpassed them.

"No wonder senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus has such an extraordinary aura and demeanor, and was so unique even in the Black-White College." Ning sighed in amazement to himself. "So she's from such an ancient clan, the Dongyan clan. The genius disciples of such an ancient, deeply rooted clan...they truly are extraordinary."

“So you come from the Dongyan clan. The Dongyan clan’s ‘Fresh Lotus Manual’ has long been famous throughout the world,” Ning said with a laugh. “I do have a few questions; might you be willing to answer them, senior apprentice-sister?”

“Junior apprentice-brother, please go ahead and ask them. If I can answer them, of course I will; if I’m not able to, then please don’t blame me,” Ninelotus replied. Ning was secretly elated; Ninelotus was from the Dongyan clan, and she most likely had an extremely deep level of understanding regarding the secrets of the lotus flower.

“I once self-created a technique, the Waterflame Lotus...” Ning immediately began to ask questions. Stretching his hand out, he immediately caused a small Waterflame Lotus to bloom out of nowhere atop his palm and began to discuss some questions he had.

“Junior apprentice-brother, actually, you’ve gained a very deep level of insight already. However, you’ve never truly realized the ways in which the various elements of this technique interact with each other.” A fresh, azure lotus appeared within Ninelotus’ palm as well. She lightly tapped just one of the petals, and one petal after another instantly began to open, like a real lotus flower beginning to bloom. In fact, one could even see the dew atop the petals.

Ning’s eyes began to shine as he listened.

“However, junior apprentice-brother, this Waterflame Lotus of yours...” Ninelotus began to ask questions of her own.

“Actually, the secrets within are quite simple...” Ning began to explain.

The two both possessed extraordinarily strong Dao-hearts, and were quite resolute in pursuing their Immortal paths. Once they became absorbed in discussing the Dao, they naturally began to ignore everything else.

The two of them...one was a truly monstrous genius of the Dao of the Sword, who had the support of the underwater estate and who had gained quite a few insights into the lotus. As for the other, she came from the massive, mighty Dongyan clan, and had meditated on the Fresh Lotus

Manual, and was even more impressive with regards to the secrets of the lotus. As the two of them discussed their insights into the Dao, they stirred insights in each other, and both of them improved.

This was the reason why Immortal cultivators delighted in discussing the Dao with others who were on the same level. If they were to truly discuss the insights they had gained without holding anything back, then as they discussed the Dao together, both would gain tremendously.

The Waterflame Lotus was a supportive technique Ning had personally developed, and so there was no need for him to withhold any of its secrets. As for Ninelotus, she knew exactly what she could say, as the Dongyan clan was an incredibly majestic clan which had strict rules on what its disciples could and could not say when discussing the Dao. Ninelotus only revealed a few of the profound mysteries that could not be considered the true secrets of the clan, but this was already enough to cause Ning to feel incomparably delighted and overjoyed.

“The two are chatting quite happily to each other.” The nearby Luo Qing felt helpless; while absorbed into their discussions of the Dao, Ji Ning and Ninelotus paid no attention to her whatsoever.

“Hmph.” She sat there next to them, picking up the vessel of wine that had previously belonged to Ning and beginning to drink it.

An entire night was spent in a discussion on the Dao. Autumn Leaf and the others didn’t dare disturb them. But by nightfall the second day, as the sun was about to disappear...

“What?! The two of you are still here?!” A silver-robed Luo Qing walked past, staring at them and shouting. As she did, Ning and Ninelotus instantly ‘woke up’. They immediately realized that a night and a day had passed.

“This junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning truly is brimming with talented. Although this Waterflame Lotus technique of his isn’t that profound, he’s gained so many insights from it.” Ninelotus began to feel even more admiring of him now. She had joined the Black-White College a long time ago, but as soon as Ning had joined, he had debated many senior fellow

disciples in the Dao Debates. If she had engaged in a Dao Debate with Ning back then, she definitely would've been defeated.

Back then, Ninelotus had begun to admire Ji Ning. Now that she saw that Ning had so many insights into the lotus, which she herself specialized in, she grew all the more admiring.

"Senior apprentice-sister Nivelotus has truly treated me well. She's told me so many secrets." Ning felt secretly grateful; after all, these techniques were not to be casually taught to others. Although she wasn't explicit about them, the pointers that she gave caused Ning to instantly comprehend. If it hadn't been for her guidance, he probably would've needed a much, much longer period of time to understand some of the things he had learned today.

"Junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, we've discussed the Dao for very long, and I've benefited greatly from it. I'm going to go back and meditate," Nivelotus said, rising to her feet. As she did, she took the nearby Luo Qing's hand and walked together to their residences.

Ning watched as Nivelotus left. Thinking back to the night and day they had spent discussing the Dao, he couldn't help but feel a strange feeling in his heart. He felt as though...he and Nivelotus were quite suited for each other.

"Eh?" Ning turned his head. The lotus of sword-ki which he had generated previously was still active. As for Ji Mo, who was within the lotus, his face was pale, and his eyes were completely bloodshot. Clearly, he had been striving an entire day and night to break the formation, and he was utterly exhausted.

"...I ended up making Ji Mo spend an entire day and night here." Ning willed the lotus to dissipate.

Whoosh. The lotus of sword-ki instantly disappeared into thin air.

"Petals? Petals?!" Ji Mo hurriedly stared around him, his eyes terrifyingly bloodshot.

"Ji Mo." Ning felt guilty, but he still called out in a high voice, "You've

spent an entire day and night on breaking through this formation; it seems you are rather tired. Go back and get some rest. Tomorrow, you may come back again and once more attempt to break this lotus sword-ki formation."

After speaking, Ning turned and left. Ji Mo stared, stunned, for a moment, then began to worry. "I spent an entire day and night here without being able to break through the sword-ki lotus...did this cause young master Ji Ning to feel angry with me?"

Time flowed on.

Ninelotus and Ning both gained significantly from their discussions on the Dao; naturally, they were quite delighted to continue. Every three or five days, they would engage in a discussion on the Dao. In the blink of an eye, more than three months had passed in leisure.

Within a private, secluded room within Brightheart Island. This was Luo Qing and Ninelotus' room. Luo Qing and Ninelotus were currently seated next to a black stone table which was as smooth as jade. Atop the table was fruit and wine.

"Senior apprentice-sister," Luo Qing said, "We've spent three months here. Isn't it time to leave? We came out to go adventuring, but the only place we've gone to is this place, Serpentwing Lake. We haven't gone anywhere else."

"No rush," Ninelotus said. "Let's spend a few more days here. During the past three months, my lotus techniques have improved considerably, even more so than in the past three years. Junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning truly is formidable; he always has so many new and original insights."

"We still aren't leaving?" Luo Qing stared, then gave Ninelotus a weighing glance. She stared carefully at Ninelotus, as though trying to find any warts or blemishes on her face.

"What are you looking at? Why are you staring at me like that?" Ninelotus frowned slightly.

"Senior apprentice-sister, I wonder...have you taken a fancy to Ji Ning,

and wish for him to be your Dao-Companion?" Luo Qing asked the question directly.

Ninelotus was stunned. Despite always being so composed, she suddenly felt rather embarrassed.

Chapter 22: The Tenth Stage of the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens]

Luo Qing was truly quite familiar with Ninelotus; the two had known each other for many years, and she had never before seen this expression on Ninelotus' face. Ninelotus had always been calm and composed, and she had a breathtaking background; she had been selected long ago to be the next leader of the Dongyan tribe. As such, Ninelotus had naturally been given the best of training since youth. To force her to reveal shyness and bashfulness...this was virtually impossible.

"You...you..." Luo Qing stared, her mouth falling open as she pointed to Ninelotus. "You really are..." Ninelotus quickly recovered her calm. "Is there a need for you to act so shocked?"

"Shocked? Senior apprentice-sister, when you were in the Dongyan clan, you had countless admirers. Even in the Black-White College, where many of our fellow disciples do not know of your history and background, you still have many admirers and pursuers. You've never taken a fancy to any of them!" Luo Qing said, shocked, "Why have you taken a fancy to him? He's a disciple of a small clan, and won't be of any help to you in administering the Dongyan clan's affairs in the future."

Ninelotus frowned, revealing a hint of displeasure. Luo Qing hurriedly shook her head and said, "I'm not saying...I mean, you..."

"Although the tribe which Ji Ning is from is a weak and small one, his own potential is quite astonishing," Ninelotus said. "You must understand that for some people, it doesn't matter which tribe they come from, because they, by themselves, are even mightier than entire tribes."

Ninelotus had a hint of anticipation in her eyes. "And...in choosing a Dao-Companion, what matters the most is the feeling one has in one's heart. He...gives me a very good feeling."

Luo Qing stared at Ninelotus. "You really are choosing him for your

Dao-Companion?” Ninelotus shook her head. “Not just yet. Immortal cultivators have extremely long lives, and the selection of a Dao-Companion is a monumental, life-altering event. Naturally, I’ll have to spend more time watching him and understanding him. We’ve only interacted for three or so months; it’s still too early to discuss becoming Dao-Companions.”

Even mortals, when in a relationship, would at least be together for a year or two before getting married. Immortal practitioners...there were even those who would be involved with each other for centuries before finally becoming Dao-Companions!

“If news of this were to spread, that the future Matriarch of the Dongyan clan has chosen a Dao-Companion...oh, boy!” Luo Qing let out a sigh. “This would definitely cause a storm of commentary!”

“My choice of a Dao-Companion is mine alone. Who can intervene?” Ninelotus was very calm. Luo Qing could sense how resolved Ninelotus was, and she immediately said, “Senior apprentice-sister, I won’t try to dissuade you from this decision. By staying here, you’ll be able to improve your understanding of your lotus techniques, and also continue to inspect a potential future Dao-Companion. For me, however, staying here is pointless...I’m planning to leave tomorrow. I’ll go around adventuring for half a year, then return to the Black-White College.”

A look of guilt appeared on Ninelotus’ face, and she took Luo Qing by the hand. “Qingqing, we said that we’d go out adventuring together...I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine. Since you are choosing a Dao-Companion, as your junior apprentice-sister, of course I’ll be supportive,” Luo Qing said with a laugh.

.....

The next day, Luo Qing departed, having been sent off by Ji Ning and the others. As for Ning and Nivelotus, they continued to live quite peacefully on Brightheart Island, discussing the Dao every few days.

“Eh?” Late one night. Ning, who had been seated in the lotus position on

his bed, suddenly revealed a hint of excitement. “It seems that over the course of the past five months, all these discussions on the Dao with senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus has caused my understanding of the ways in which fire and water support and neutralize each other to rise significantly. I’ve finally understood the final principles that were necessary for a breakthrough to the tenth stage of the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens].”

“In I go.” Ning willed it, and instantly, a giant phantom of a bear’s head appeared out of nowhere within the room. It opened its mouth, swallowing the seated Ning within it. And, just like that, Ning disappeared..

.....

Within the main hall in the underwater estate. The giant prayer mats were there, the same as ever. Ning casually chose one of them, taking a seat in the lotus position.

“Ji Ning, kid, why’ve you returned so soon after your last trip?” The old black bull looked at Ning. At this moment, the giant yellow bear suddenly materialized as well. “He’s about to make his breakthrough. If he were to make it in his own room, it would probably be destroyed. In addition, to be a bit more cautious, he decided to come here, to the underwater estate, which naturally would be the safest place.”

Ning sat there in the lotus position, having absorbed his magic robes into his body, leaving it completely nude. “Let it begin.”

Since he had already grasped the essence of it, Ning immediately began to activate the principles of the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens]. Whoosh! Whoosh!

Upon Ning’s bared back, the Divine Solar Tattoo and the Divine Lunar Tattoo all suddenly lit up with incomparable brilliance. They instantly began to resonate with those two most supreme of celestial bodies, the Solar Star and the Lunar Star, which were located an unfathomable distance away and separated by countless realms. The Solar Star and the Lunar Star instantly began to send out a stream of Solar Truefire and

Lunar Truewater towards him.

To advance from the ninth stage to the tenth stage was a major leap between realms. With each major transformation, the Solar Star and the Lunar Star would provide their assistance, causing the divine body to become transformed once more.

“Breakthroughs via the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens] truly are special.” The giant yellow bear stared at the lotus flowers, stamen, and petals that had appeared around Ning, all of which looked just like real ones. Ning was completely enfolded within the lotus flower. “Each time, there will be Solar Truefire and Lunar Truewater to assist. This sort of divine body will thus have the potential to control Solar Truefire and Lunar Truewater in the future.”

“To advance from earthfire and dire-ice to skyfire and sky-ice, then to Solar Truefire and Lunar Truewater...” The nearby black bull shook his head. “That is all too far off. Generally speaking, only Celestial Immortals and Empyrean Gods have the chance to control Solar Truefire and Lunar Truewater...and that’s just a chance.”

A cultivator had to start by nurturing earthfire, then slowly improve it step by step, painstakingly nourishing it to the point of it becoming Solar Truefire when the cultivator became a Celestial Immortal!

“He’s almost finished,” the giant yellow bear said. Indeed. The Waterflame Lotus surrounding Ning was beginning to turn translucent; clearly, the truefire and truewater within had slowly been completely absorbed by Ning. The translucent petals of the Waterflame Lotus slowly opened, revealing Ning within the heart of the lotus. Every single part of Ning’s body was incomparably perfect; it was the body of a Fiendgod!

Ning opened his eyes, and the fur clothes appeared on his body. They still appeared just like the ones his mother had made for him.

“I broke through,” Ning said with a smile. What massive, majestic divine power. His entire body coursed with a flood of strength!

At the ninth stage, he was only comparable to regular, early Wanxiang Fiendgod Refiners. But at the tenth stage, he was already comparable to

late Wanxiang Fiendgod Refiners! Most importantly of all...after every three stages, there would be a major gap, and passing through each gap was extremely hard. The three mini-stages were much easier to advance through; one only had to absorb enough solar power and lunar power in order to break through. Thus, there would be no bottlenecks for Ning as he advanced from the tenth to the twelfth stage.

"I have the Fiendgod body of a late Wanxiang Adept, and have mastered the third stance of the [Three-Foot Sword]!" Ning mused to himself, "And, with the divine ability, [Starseizing Hand]...my current level of power is significantly greater than it was back in the wild marshes of the Gaol Mountains. If I were to once more encounter a Primal-level Dragonwhale Diremonster, it wouldn't be too hard for me to fight against him head on. And, I most likely should be on par with senior apprentice-brother Bloodshadow," Ning thought to himself delightedly.

In terms of Fiendgod bodies, Bloodshadow was merely at the peak Wanxiang stage; Ning was comparable to being at the late Wanxiang stage, and was just slightly weaker. However, he had a far more powerful divine ability! And, with the help of his swordplay...

"Given my current level of power, I can fight against Primal Daoists now. Even if I cannot overcome them, I should be able to escape," Ning mused to himself.

"Ji Ning." The giant yellow bear spoke out. "Senior." Ning looked towards him. "Since your foundation has improved, your power has naturally improved as well," the giant yellow bear said. "If you were to go re-challenge the third level of the Wargod Hall, even without relying on archery, you would have a 100% chance of obtaining victory in close quarters combat."

Ning laughed. "Then if I were to go challenge the fourth level? Would I pass?" "The chances of passing are less than ten percent," the giant yellow bear said. "Once your Fiendgod body reaches the eleventh stage, you should have a 30% or 40% chance of victory. If you were to improve in swordplay as well, then your chances would become still greater. To overcome the fourth level of the Wargod Hall...generally speaking, you'll

need to be powerful enough to defeat Primal Daoists.”

Ning couldn’t help but secretly shake his head. Oh, Daoist Threelives...

The bar he had set for his successors really was too high. Even someone as monstrous as Ning found it incredibly difficult; the former successor, Immortal Juhua, really was unfortunate! He ended up becoming a Loose Immortal, and only many years after doing so was he capable of defeating the seventh stage and selecting an extremely powerful Immortal-ranked magic treasure. Unfortunately...by then, it was too late.

“No rush. I’ll challenge the fourth level of Wargod Hall next time,” Ning said with a laugh. “I just made a breakthrough as a Fiendgod; I can be considered to have reached the Wanxiang level formally now.”

The giant yellow bear nodded. “Yes.” Ning’s eyes lit up, blazing with eagerness. “Then I now have another chance to choose a treasure from the Treasures Hall.”

“Naturally. You will only have a total of three choices each time, so you must be cautious each time you do so; there’s no going back after you make your choice,” the giant yellow bear said. “Come. Let’s go to the Treasures Hall and slowly pick through the treasures.”

.....

An hour later. After having selected yet another treasure, and with his power greatly improved, Ning quietly returned to Serpentwing Lake. No one knew that within those two short hours, Ning had left Serpentwing lake. Naturally, no one knew that Ning’s power had greatly improved.

Time continued to flow on. In the blink of an eye, a year had passed since Ninelotus had arrived at Serpentwing Lake.

The distant Stillwater City. The Black-White College.

“Junior apprentice-sister Qingqing!” In the skies above a mountain, a black-suited youth was calling out in a high voice.

“Senior apprentice-brother Flowcloud, it’s quite rare for you to come visit me here.” A tall, willowy, silver-robed, maiden, Luo Qing, walked out

of her courtyard. Raising her head, she smiled towards the skies as she spoke. The black-suited youth in the air immediately landed in the courtyard.

“Senior apprentice-brother Flowcloud, please sit,” Luo Qing said. The black-uniformed youth sat down, then laughed, “I heard that recently, junior apprentice-sister Qingqing, you came back from your adventures, so I came to see how you are doing...as I recall, you and junior apprentice-sister Ninelotus went out together. Why is it that a year later, you returned but she did not?”

Luo Qing hesitated a moment, then said, “Chen Jin!”

The black-suited youth was startled. Chen Jin was his true name; however, Qingqing usually referred to him by his Daoist title, as ‘senior apprentice-brother Flowcloud’. For her to address him by his actual name...she most likely was going to discuss something important with him.

“You, me, and Ninelotus, we all came to Stillwater City together,” Luo Qing said in a low voice. “You and I both know about her background.” Chen Jin nodded. “Of course I do.”

“In the past, when senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus was in the Dongyan clan, you continuously wooed her. When she brought me to Stillwater City and the Black-White College, you decided to enter the Black-White College as well...I know that your heart has continued to be infatuated with her,” Luo Qing said.

Chen Jin laughed. “Although Ninelotus has never nodded and accepted me, I’ll continue to wait. Ten years, a hundred years...I’ll slowly wait for her.”

“There’s something...” Luo Qing gritted her teeth. “...that I think I must tell you about.”

“What is it?” Chen Jin laughed. Luo Qing looked so unwilling to speak out; could it be that she was about to confess feelings for him?

Luo Qing took a deep breath. “Senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus has

chosen a Dao-Companion.”

Chen Jin was stunned.

“But unfortunately...it isn’t you.” Luo Qing looked at him.

It was as though a thunderbolt had fallen out of the clear skies, completely stunning Chen Jin.

Chapter 23: Holyfire

“What did you say?” Chen Jin stared at Luo Qing, an incomparably terrifying look in his eyes. “Say it again!”

Luo Qing knew Chen Jin very well. She naturally could guess at what Chen Jin was currently feeling, and she immediately said with solemnity, “I said...that senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus has already chosen a Dao-Companion. She’s chosen someone else, not you.”

Chen Jin’s face was ashen, and his body swayed.

“A pity,” Luo Qing murmured to herself secretly. They had been friends for many years, and so she couldn’t bear for Chen Jin to be kept in the dark. However, she also knew exactly what a blow this was for Chen Jin to hear. “He pursued her for so many years without success. In the end, junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, who didn’t even pursue her, ended up attracting her attention.”

Chen Jin shook his head. “Impossible. Ninelotus is the future Matriarch of the Dongyan clan; she has tremendous expectations for her future. Not even the many geniuses of the Black-White College have ever attracted her attention. Soundless and silently, she suddenly selected a Dao-Companion?”

“His name is Ji Ning,” Luo Qing said. “He’s our junior apprentice-brother. His Daoist title is Darknorth.”

“Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth?” Chen Jin was stunned. Ji Ning, also known as Adept Darknorth, was quite resoundingly famous within the Black-White College. When this crazy junior apprentice-brother had first joined, in the Dao Debates, his performance had been such that the reincarnated Immortal, Rainbowflame Fairy Yu Wei, had been forced to personally intervene to overcome him. However, back then, Chen Jin had been carrying out a mission for the Raindragon Guard, and so hadn’t been in the College and hadn’t met Ning.

But he knew very well...for him to have been so powerful immediately after joining the school, and to have been selected by Immortal Diancai as

a disciple, this person, Ji Ning, would definitely be one of the most supreme disciples of the Black-White College.

"Him?" Chen Jin couldn't help but say, "How can that be? How long have they even known each other? Ninelotus is the future Matriarch of the Dongyan tribe; she's extremely cautious by nature, and she considers all of her actions thoroughly. Even if truly she were to choose a Dao-Companion, she would be more prudent than prudence itself in doing so. It is precisely this temperament of hers that has led the various Immortals of the Dongyan clan to jointly concur on her as their choice. Even though her background is astonishing, it alone wouldn't be enough for her to be selected as the next leader. Given her temperament...she couldn't possibly have chosen a Dao-Companion this quickly!"

Luo Qing nodded. "You understand her very well. The choice of a Dao-Companion is a choice that will change one's life. Indeed, she didn't come to a decision this quickly. I'll tell you something...she's already spent an entire year with Ji Ning, in the secluded Serpentwing Lake of Swallow Mountain."

"She's spent a full year with Ji Ning in his secluded residence?" Chen Jin's face changed. There was no man who could accept the fact that the woman he loved had been living with another man for a full year! The same was true for Immortal cultivators! In fact, the purity of an Immortal cultivator's Dao-heart made it so that they were far more terrifyingly stubborn than most mortals.

"So what if they were together for a year?" Chen Jin suppressed the rage in his heart.

"When senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus and I first arrived there, we spent three months there, and I left," Luo Qing said. "I'm a woman as well; I could sense what senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus was feeling. After just three months...she was already beginning to show hints of bashfulness on her face. Now that a year has passed...I can't even guess at how far the relationship between her and Ji Ning has developed!"

Chen Jin's face was as lifeless as steel! He was completely dazed, and

his mind was in a state of chaos.. Bashfulness? Three months? Now a year? How far the relationship had developed? What had happened? Could it be that the two of them had already...

"IMPOSSIBLE!" Chen Jin let out a growl, then transformed into a streak of light, flying into the distance.

Watching him fly away, Luo Qing couldn't help but shake her head. "He actually lost composure this badly. It seems this truly was a major blow to him. I really didn't want to tell you, but I had to...telling you now means that you'll have a chance to fight for her. If I were to tell you in a few years...you would probably have no hope at all."

As far as she was personally concerned, given that she, Ninelotus, and Flowcloud had all come to Stillwater City together, she naturally felt extremely close to both of them. Between Ji Ning and Flowcloud...she naturally was biased towards Flowcloud, Chen Jin!

Chen Ji flew blindly through the skies, confusion raging in his mind. "No, no, I can't...I can't continue like this. I need to immediately go to the place where Ji Ning is living, to that Serpentwing Lake place in Swallow Mountain. Right now! Immediately! This very moment!"

Panic. Worry. Unease. These emotions tore at his breast.

"Flowcloud, come in." A voice suddenly rang out in his mind, carrying a hint of meditative dhyana; it actually was able to instantly suppress the turbulent emotions in Chen Jin's heart.

"Uncle Fire?" Chen Jin was stunned. He looked ahead of himself, towards a mountain peak and the scarlet red estate built atop it. This was the residence of one of the leaders of the third generation disciples of the Black-White College - Holyfire.

"Earlier, my mind was in a state of chaos. I actually unconsciously made my way to Uncle Fire's place. It seems as though...my heart subconsciously felt that this was the safest, most secure place for me in the entire Black-White College?" Chen Jin immediately flew into the estate below.

Within a courtyard.

A handsome, elegant looking bald youth, dressed in a fiery red robe, was seated in the lotus position, his feet bare. He seemed almost crystalline in his incomparable purity, and yet he also seemed to blaze like a flame, causing the temperature in the surrounding area to rise.

“Uncle Fire.” Chen Jin walked in. Although both he and Holyfire were third generation disciples, in terms of age, Holyfire was more than a century older than him. When he was but a child, Holyfire had already been a prominent figure amongst the other third generation disciples of the Black-White College. Because Holyfire was on extremely good terms with his clan, the Chen clan, ever since Chen Jin had been young, he had addressed him as ‘Uncle Fire’. Even after he himself had joined the Black-White College, he continued to address Holyfire in this way.

“I can tell that your aura is disturbed, and a look of chaos and wildness is in your eyes. If this continues, your Dao-heart will be damaged.”

Holyfire shook his head. “What exactly has happened?”

“Uncle Fire, I, I...” Chen Jin found it difficult to speak. Holyfire let out a calm laugh. In terms of Dao-heart and comprehension, there were actually even many Primal Daoists who were inferior to him. In terms of pure power, there were even some Primal Daoists who had been defeated by him! In addition, Holyfire had already made his preparations...in the next few years, he was going to make his breakthrough to the Primal Daoist level. In the entire Black-White College, of the third generation disciples, only the Sloppy Daoist was able to suppress him in might. This wasn’t because Holyfire wasn’t strong; it was because the Sloppy Daoist was truly too much of a monster.

Even Wanxiang Adepts who were reincarnated Immortals were completely convinced of the Sloppy Daoist’s superiority. He, and he alone, was acknowledged by all as the number one figure amongst the third generation disciples.

However, monsters like the Sloppy Daoist only came once in countless years. In addition, they had a chance at becoming Celestial Immortals. In

any other era, someone like Holyfire, who was capable of defeating Primal Daoists as a Wanxiang Disciple, would have already been considered the number one figure amongst the third generation disciples.

“Speak,” Holyfire said. His voice seemed to carry a power to calm the hearts of others. Chen Jin nodded. “It is because of Ninelotus. Uncle Fire, as you know, Ninelotus and I grew up together, and our parents are good friends with each other.” Having calmed down, Chen Jin began to slowly narrate everything, but towards the end, he couldn’t help but begin to grow frantic once more. “...but she’s now spent a full year at Serpentwing Lake of Swallow Mountain! That’s Ji Ning’s place. I, I...”

“Don’t panic,” Holyfire said calmly. “Panicking won’t help solve the situation; thus, why panic? Your Dao-heart is insufficiently tempered. Romantic love between men and women can result in an emotional tribulation. If you trap yourself too deeply within it, then when you encounter the Three Calamities and Nine Tribulations, you will most likely suffer greatly for it.”

Chen Jin was shocked into awareness by these words.

“I know that you can’t possibly wait, however, so...I’ll come with you. Let me take a look and see what techniques this junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning has used to attract the attention of that child, Ninelotus,” Holyfire said with a laugh.

“Uncle Fire, you’ll come with me?” Chen Jin revealed a look of joy. Chen Jin had joined the Raindragon Guard long ago, and was extremely powerful amongst the third generation disciples of the Black-White College; he was only inferior to the most monstrous of the other disciples. The reincarnated Immortal, Yu Wei, was slightly stronger than him as well; he could be considered to be one of the top ten disciples.

This was, of course, in reference to real combat power. Thus, Chen Jin was actually quite talented...and why he was always extremely self-confident.

“Come.”

Very soon, a fiery cloud arose. Atop it stood two figures; Holyfire and

Chen Jin. They rapidly soared into the skies.

Serpentwing Lake.

It was spring, now. The days were warm, and the flowers were blooming. A boat was lazily drifting atop the waters of Serpentwing Lake. Ning was lying down within the boat, sleeping blissfully. There was another person within the boat...Ninelotus, who was seated within it. Ninelotus sat there, looking quietly at the sleeping Ji Ning.

A year...

The two of them had become extremely familiar with each other, to the point where they could faintly sense the joy each felt for the other's presence. But the selection of a Dao-Companion...both Ninelotus and Ji Ning were hesitant. Choosing a Dao-Companion was an incomparably important decision. Ninelotus was the next leader of the Dongyan clan, while Ning was the heir to the underwater estate; he had already cast his vision beyond the limits of this major world, and his goal was to roam the Three Realms and become a major power within them.

Both of these two were extremely ambitious, and their Dao-hearts were extremely resolute. Thus, neither of them would casually choose a Dao-Companion. However...for Ning to be willing to allow Ninelotus to accompany him in floating in the waters of Serpentwing Lake represented certain thoughts and feelings that Ning felt.

"Is this...truly like sleeping in the embrace of his parents?" Ninelotus mused silently to herself. Because Ning often liked to lie on that boat and drift on the waters of Serpentwing Lake, Ninelotus had asked Autumn Leaf, "Why is it that your young master often goes to lie on that boat and drift around on Serpentwing Lake for an entire day?"

"The ashes of his parents were sprinkled atop Serpentwing Lake. Serpentwing Lake is like his parents," Autumn Leaf had said.

For some reason...Ninelotus had felt a twinge of pain in her heart.

"If I were to lose my parents?" Ninelotus thought of her own father and mother. Both of them were alive, and her elders were all tremendously

powerful. "Ji Ning, he..." Ninelotus couldn't help but stretch out her hand, gently stroking Ning's face with it.

Ning continued to sleep.

Ninelotus gently helped Ning adjust his hair. She watched there, quietly, feeling an unusual calmness in her heart.

In midair. A fiery cloud was flying towards them at high speed, and atop it were two figures. Both of them stared downwards. As they did, they immediately saw that little boat floating atop Serpentwing Lake. Ning was lying there, within that small boat, his head next to Ninelotus, who sat next to him, helping him comb his hair.

"Ninelotus!" Chen Jin, aboard the fiery cloud, instantly turned red-eyed as he saw this.

Chapter 24: Burning With Jealousy

They had grown up together, and he had followed her all the way from Highwater Commandery to Stillwater Commandery and entered the Black-White College with her. After having pursued her for so long, how could Chen Jin not be infuriated by what he saw in front of him?

“Flowcloud.” The nearby Holyfire grabbed Chen Jin by the arm, pulling him towards him. Chen Jin had been about to charge out.

“Uncle Fire.” Chen Jin turned to look at him. Holyfire looked back, gaze as calm as ever. “Calm down.”

Chen Jin said, agonized, “How can I possibly calm down. I have to ask and understand exactly what the hell is Ninelotus thinking. Why would she take a fancy to this kid, Ji Ning?” Although they were fellow disciples, Chen Jin was currently filled with boundless disgust and distaste for Ning.

“You’ll only have a chance if you can calm down.” Holyfire looked at him.

Chen Jin wasn’t a fool; he had simply been provoked by the scene before him. He quickly suppressed his rage, then nodded and said, “Uncle Fire, don’t worry. I won’t do anything crazy.”

“Right. No matter what, we are all fellow disciples of the same school. We cannot commit fratricide against each other,” Holyfire instructed. “Come. Let’s go meet with junior apprentice-brother Darknorth and junior apprentice-sister Ninelotus.”

Chen Jin obediently followed by his side as the two flew downwards...

Atop the boat. A surge of power was rippling down towards them from the skies. Ninelotus couldn’t help but look upwards, and the ripple of power caused Ning to awaken from his slumber and open his eyes.

“Is that...?” Ning immediately recognized the bald, handsome, crimson-robed, bare-footed youth who had a divine svastika tattoo in the middle of his forehead. A look of surprise appeared on Ning’s face. “Senior apprentice-brother Holyfire? Why has he suddenly come to my place?”

There shouldn't be many people who know that I am here at Serpentwing Lake of Swallow Mountain."

Holyfire had mastered a complete Dao Path, and whose Fiendgod body had reached the peak of the Wanxiang level long ago. He had even defeated Primal Daoists before. He was one of the true leaders of the third generation disciples of the Black-White College!

"Senior apprentice-brother Holyfire, senior apprentice-brother Flowcloud." The nearby Ninelotus' face suddenly changed. "He actually came...it seems Qingqing must've told him. This will be troublesome." As soon as she saw the two, Ninelotus was able to guess at what had happened.

"Ji Ning." Ninelotus hurriedly sent to him, "Next to senior apprentice-brother Holyfire is senior apprentice-brother Flowcloud! Be careful of him."

"Be careful of him? He should be one of our fellow disciples, right? Although I've never met him, I've heard of his name and that he is very powerful. Why should I be careful of him?" Ning was puzzled; he had never met Flowcloud before, and no enmity existed between them.

"Just be careful." Ninelotus gritted her teeth. Right at this moment, Holyfire and Chen Jin flew down from the skies, landing atop the water. The two strode forward atop the water as easily as if they were walking on flat land.

"Senior apprentice-brothers Holyfire and Flowcloud," Ning laughed, "Why have the two of you come to my Swallow Mountain?"

Holyfire smiled at him. "We learned that you were here by chance," Holyfire said. As for Chen Jin, he just let out a cold snort, not speaking. This caused Ning to feel surprised...he had never offended this man before. Why was he treating Ning so coldly? Just now, Ninelotus had also warned him to be wary of Flowcloud...it seemed there really were some strange things going on. Multiple thoughts instantly began to flit through Ning's mind.

"Since you've come to my place, senior fellow disciples, I naturally will

show the hospitality of a host. Senior fellow disciples, please come with me,” Ning said warmly.

“No need.” The black-suited Chen Jin gave a cold response.

Ning frowned. No matter how good-tempered he was, he wouldn’t try to ingratiate himself to someone who was treating him icily. “Oh, then why have you come to my place, senior apprentice-brother Flowcloud?”

Holyfire gently shook his head, not saying anything. As for Chen Jin, he looked at Ninelotus. He stared directly into her eyes.

Ning couldn’t help but begin to feel anger rise in his heart. After having been together with her for a year, Ning had begun to understand how Ninelotus felt, and the two of them had reached a tacit level of understanding. They hadn’t felt the need to rush into open proclamations, but...Ning naturally felt quite upset for this Chen Jin to stare so fixedly at ‘his’ senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus.

“Senior apprentice-brother Flowcloud,” Ning barked.

“Shut your mouth.” Chen Jin gave him an angry glance.

Ning’s gaze instantly turned sharp. Although he had been angry, he had at least been able to maintain a level of decorum. But this Flowcloud telling him to shut his mouth was a clear sign that he intended to give Ning no face at all. If that was the case, then he had no need to give him any face either. He immediately barked back, “Flowcloud, this is my territory. This isn’t a place for you to throw your weight around. Get the f*ck out of Serpentwing Lake.”

Chen Jin was startled by Ning’s shout, and he immediately said with fury, “You think you are capable of making me leave? You don’t know your own limits.”

As for the nearby Holyfire, he just watched quietly. Ninelotus, however, could no longer hold back. “Chen Jin!” Ninelotus barked angrily. Chen Jin, pain in his eyes, turned to look at her.

“Ninelotus, leave this to me,” Ning said. Although Flowcloud was famous, Ning truly didn’t hold him in any regard. Amongst Wanxiang

Disciples, only the truly most top-tier experts such as Holyfire were capable of inspiring caution in Ning.

"Let me handle it." Ninelotus shook her head, staring at Chen Jin.

Chen Jin, agonized, looked back at her. "Little Yun, you've really made up your mind?"

Ninelotus let out a light sigh. She had grown up with Chen Jin, after all. "Chen Jin, stop being so stubborn. Let it go."

Let it go?

Let it go?

Let it go?

These three words continuously echoed in Chen Jin's mind, causing the last vestiges of hope that he had in his mind to instantly be exterminated. His face changed, beginning to redden as he pointed towards Ning and howled, "Because of HIM!?"

"Chen Jin!" Ninelotus immediately barked at him but Chen Jin said, agonized, "Little Yun, we grew up together. When we were young, you always liked to be together with me as well, right? Because of you, I left Highwater Commandery and came to join the Black-White College of Stillwater Commandery! You should know that my departure from Highwater Commandery had a major impact on my status within the tribe, but for your sake, I didn't hesitate at all. I sacrificed so much, and in all these years, I've never wavered in my feelings towards you. You...you...you...this is how you are going to treat me?"

Ning, standing there, finally understood. So the two of them had known each other as children...but so what? Did they necessarily have to become Dao-Companions, just because they had grown up together?

"Chen Jin." Ninelotus shook her head. "I've never accepted you, despite the passage of all these years. How can you not understand?"

"Understand what?" Chen Jin let out a cold laugh. "You just grew fickle-hearted!"

Ninelotus was stunned. As for Chen Jin, a cold light flashed through his eyes. His many years of pursuit had resulted in such an ending...his final hopes had been extinguished. The jealousy that he had previously felt was completely transformed into rage! He was enraged...enraged that all of his sacrifices over the years had been like water that flowed east into the sea, never to return. Enraged that Ninelotus had actually taken a fancy to this kid from a minor clan!"

"No need to say anything else." Chen Jin looked at Ninelotus. "Dongyan Yun, after today, I will never bother you again. However, your judgment truly is terrible for you to have taken a fancy to this kid! We've been friends for so many years...today, I'll help you out and let you know how utterly worthless this kid you've taken a fancy to is!"

"Ji Ning!" Chen Jin let out a loud roar.

Rumble...instantly, the air above Serpentwing Lake instantly exploded with noise. At the same time, a large number of clouds began to gather, and the entire world seemed to change color. Around the black-suited Chen Jin, 108 golden disks of light suddenly appeared out of nowhere, all of which immediately flew towards the skies in every which way.

The clouds into the sky also surged at high speed towards those 108 golden disks of light. Soon, the clouds had transformed into a formation of 108 giant clouds, which were shaped like lions, chariots, dragons, and other creatures. These 108 giant clouds circled about the surrounding area.

As for Chen Jin, he stood there in midair, staring towards the distant Ning and shouting, "Ji Ning, if you have even the slightest bit of courage, then come battle with me. I'll let Ninelotus know...that you will crumple at a single blow. But of course, if you have no courage, if you are afraid, then just hurry up and get the hell away from Ninelotus. You aren't worthy of her!"

"Chen Jin!" Ninelotus was angry now as well. But the nearby Ning stretched out his arm, stopping her. Ninelotus couldn't help but turn to look at him.

“Leave it to me.” Ning only said these four words. Ninelotus felt her heart tremble; she could sense Ning’s determination.

The changes to the world near Serpentwing Lake and the sudden appearance of these 108 giant clouds had thrown Brightheart Island into a state of chaos. Many people charged out, and even Patriarch Ninefire, Granny Shadow, and the old servant Ah Xing came out to see what was going on.

“What’s going on?”

“What’s happened? Who is causing trouble here at our Serpentwing Lake?”

All of them were shocked and mystified. Ninefire, Granny Shadow, and Autumn Leaf all looked towards the Whitewater Hound and the Azure Skysnake.

“That red-robed man is named Holyfire; he’s one of the leaders of the third generation disciples of the Black-White College. He’s extremely powerful, and supposedly has even defeated Primal Daoists,” the Whitewater Hound said. “Next to Holyfire is another disciple of the Black-White College; his name is Flowcloud.”

“If they are all disciples of the Black-White College, what’s there to fight about?” Autumn Leaf said, worried, “Is the young master alright?”

“Ning’s already sent a message to me. Don’t worry,” the Whitewater Hound said. But although he said that, he was very worried as well, because he had spent quite a long period of time in the Black-White College and heard of Flowcloud’s reputation. In addition, the grand aura of the technique which Flowcloud had just used was proof that his power was unfathomably greater than the likes of Dong One and Northriver Zhou.

This was a true elite of the Black-White College!

“Ning, son, be careful,” the Whitewater Hound sent mentally to him. Ning’s soul was so powerful that he could engage in a spiritual communication with his spirit-beast as long as they were in range of his

divine sense.

Ninelotus looked at Ning, worry in her gaze. Although she knew that Ning was monstrously talented, he had still only been in the Black-White College for five years. Flowcloud, also known as ‘Chen Jin’, was also extremely talented and had been training for many years, and was shockingly strong. She was very worried that the two would truly engage in a wild, murderous battle against each other.

“Hmph.” Chen Jin, in midair, saw the look of worry on her face. He couldn’t help but let out a cold snort. “Ji Ning, dare you or dare you not? If you don’t have the courage to fight, then f*ck off and go back to your little clan.”

“Chen Jin.” Ning strode through the air, one step at a time, moving higher and higher with each step. As he did, he spoke calmly, “It seems that your embarrassment has transformed into anger. Becoming Dao-Companions is a personal matter for two individuals; can it be that just because you were stubborn in your pursuit, that Ninelotus has to accept you? You think a bit too highly of yourself. As for you saying that you wish for Ninelotus to know how utterly worthless I am, that I can’t stand up to a single blow...once again, I’m afraid you think a bit too highly yourself.”

“Enough bullshit. Do you dare to fight or not?” Chen Jin stared at the distant Ning.

Ning continued to walk through the air, soon coming to stand at an equal level to Chen Jin. The two stood there in midair, staring at each other. A Darknorth Sword suddenly appeared in Ning’s hands. A sword-hum rang out, filling the air above Serpentwing Lake.

“Come, then,” Ning said calmly.

Chapter 25: Ji Ning Battles Chen Jin

The two stood there in midair. As for Holyfire and Ninelotus, they stood atop the water, heads raised, watching them. Ninelotus sent frantically, "Senior apprentice-brother Holyfire, aren't you going to stop Chen Jin?"

Holyfire, head raised, continued to watch. He sent back calmly, "Chen Jin wooed you for many years. The rage generated from the instant eradication of a dream held for many years is quite astonishingly great; it's best to let him give vent to it. After doing so, in the future, it will cast less of a shadow on his heart. If he has to completely suppress his feelings, in the future, it will prove to be a disaster for him."

"For the sake of letting him give vent, you are going to make junior apprentice-brother Ning suffer," Ninelotus said angrily.

"Don't worry. The Black-White College forbids its disciples from fratricide," Holyfire said.

"Although the Black-White College does indeed forbid fratricide, as far as I can tell, Chen Jin has gone completely mad. He's capable of anything right now. Although the College might punish him later, if he truly does wound Ji Ning...what good would punishment do?" Ninefire said furiously, "Senior apprentice-brother Holyfire, you are very powerful; you can stop him."

Holyfire gave Ninelotus a glance. "If something dangerous truly happens, I'll intervene."

"I'm afraid that by that time, it would be too late. They are Wanxiang Adepts, after all, and you, senior apprentice-brother Holyfire, are a Wanxiang Adept as well. Life and death can be determined in an instant... senior apprentice-brother Holyfire, you won't necessarily be able to make it in time," Ninefire shouted back mentally. She wanted to give Holyfire more pressure, hoping that he might intervene.

Holyfire just raised his head, continuing to watch.

.....

Ji Ning and Chen Jin were in midair, staring at each other.

"Kid of a puny clan, so you actually have the courage to battle me." Chen Jin let out a cold laugh, then sent mentally, "But this will make you all the more aware of your foolishness!"

Faint flames could be seen burning in Ning's eyes as well now. The flames of rage!

"I'll let you know how weak you are, how puny you are, how worthless you are!" Chen Jin's eyes were filled with savagery. "In terms of clans, the Chen clan of Highwater Commandery is unfathomably more powerful than your puny little backwater clan. In terms of parentage, both your parents are dead, while my father is a Primal Daoist! In terms of personal power, I'm one of the top ten third generation disciples of the Black-White College, but you? You are merely a junior disciple who just entered a few years ago. Now, let me, your senior apprentice-brother, help you wake up and understand...that compared to me, you are a pile of shit!"

His voice rang out by Ning's ear. Ning's face became extremely ugly to behold...these were the words of a disciple of the Black-White College?!

"Indeed, even Immortal cultivators who are normally calm, reserved, and aloof, upon going berserk, can become thousands of times uglier and more unsightly than evil commoners." Rage was now truly burning in Ning's heart.

Comparing clans?

Comparing parents?

Comparing personal power?

The reference to his parents had particularly enraged Ning.

"Chen Jin, you've always chased after Ninelotus, but she never paid any attention to you, right?" Ning sent back, his voice mocking, "You chased her for so many years, but she never paid you any attention, and yet you still weren't wise enough to just give up. I feel embarrassed on your behalf! Just look at yourself. Take a good look at yourself...look at how ugly you look right now, with that angry look on your face. Honestly...you

are worse than a pile of shit.”

Ning’s words struck straight at Chen Jin’s weakness. Ninelotus had never shown him any interest...there was no way he could refuse this. As far as relationships went, Ninelotus had already chosen Ning; this meant that Ning was the victor.

“You really deserve to die!” Chen Jin’s eyes flashed with savage light. “Wind!” Chen Jin suddenly let out a great howl. The giant clouds that had filled the skies instantly began to glow with streaks of light which condensed around Chen Jin’s body, forming into a gigantic azure bird-of-paradise. The massive azure bird-of-paradise proudly raised its head, the plumage atop its head clearly visible, as well as the arrogance in its eyes.

“Compared to me, you are nothing!” Chen Jin sent a furious mental roar to Ning, while at the same time, the gigantic azure bird-of-paradise charged at high speed towards Ning.

Ning stood there in midair. “Hmph.” Ning let out a cold snort. The area around him instantly became filled with a large number of flying swords. In the center of the mass of flying swords were those nine black Nethercold swords, which had caused the power of the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] to rise by a full level. Light began to glow from the flying swords, and soon, a jade sword of light appeared before Ning. This was the ninth level of the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation]!

“CHOP!” Ning let out an explosive roar. The jade sword of light instantly slashed through the skies, and as it did, the vague outlines of a tri-colored lotus could be seen. Ning had already reached the ‘*Dao Domain*’ level in the *Dao of Rainwater*, the *Dao of the Inferno*, and the *Dao of the Gale*. The power of his Tripartite Lotus Sword had also reached an astonishing level, and the attack of this sword was filled with some of the mysteries of the *Grand Dao of the Sword*.

The sword-light flashed, and as it did, it was as though a dragon had appeared in the skies.

Rumble...the azure bird-of-paradise charging down at high speed instantly collided with the dragon of sword-light. It was just like Chef

Ding carving the ox 1; the sword-light sliced seamlessly through the azure bird-of-paradise, causing it to be instantly chopped apart.

.....

“What?!” A look of shock appeared on Holyfire’s face. He knew exactly how strong Chen Jin was; Chen Jin could be said to be one of the top ten figures of the third generation disciples of the Black-White College. “Although that attack wasn’t his strongest, it was one of his more formidable techniques; how could it have been suppressed by Ji Ning? In addition, Ji Ning used flying swords, not close-quarters combat.”

Ninelotus, by Holyfire’s side, was similarly shocked. She had no idea as to exactly how strong Ning was in real combat, because during this year at Serpentwing Lake, Ning had never truly exploded forth with his full power in battle.

“He actually...actually...” Ninelotus couldn’t believe it. “Can it be that Ji Ning is going to defeat Chen Jin?”

.....

Ninefire, Granny Shadow, and the others on Brightheart Island all felt extremely nervous. This combat between two Wanxiang Adepts was a world-shaking battle to them, and the power of these blows vastly outstripped the might that had been on display during their previous battle at Oxhorn Mountain. Everyone, including Autumn Leaf, Bluestone, Uncle White, and Qingqing, felt extremely nervous. However, upon seeing Ning’s sword-light chop through the azure bird-of-paradise, they all felt relieved. “It seems he’s going to win.” The Whitewater Hound nodded slightly.

As for the midair Chen Jin, his face was completely ashen. He had wanted to teach Ning a vicious lesson in front of Ninelotus and trample over him, so as to let Ninelotus know how worthless this Ji Ning was, and that he, Chen Jin, was the truly powerful one.

Chen Jin knew very well that in the world of Immortal cultivators, strength determined a person’s true status; everything else was meaningless. He wanted to use his own strength to show that he was

more powerful than this kid, Ji Ning, which Ninelotus had taken a fancy to.

“How could...” Chen Jin couldn’t accept this outcome.

“Come, winds! Come, clouds!” Chen Jin suddenly let out a savage roar. Instantly, the skies once more began to gather power, and two creatures simultaneously appeared; an enormous azure bird-of-paradise, and a pure, golden divine dragon.

The bird-of-paradise and the divine dragon coiled about each other, a shocking aura of power radiating from them. They charged directly towards Ning.

“Chop!” The distant Ning once more let out a cold, angry bark. The power of the ninth level of the [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] once more exploded forth. This time, the jade sword of light seemed to be like a painter’s brush, swiping outwards in an arc that was so beautiful as to cause the heart to tremble...and as it painted a streak of light through the skies, an astonishingly sharp sword-flash appeared as well.

The third stance of the [Three-Foot Sword] – Sudden Sword Light!

“What?!” Holyfire was watching this from down below, and upon seeing this technique, his eyes instantly turned completely round. “The [Three-Foot Sword] – Sudden Sword Light!”

“This...!” Ninelotus was shocked as well. They were both disciples of the Black-White College, and the first six stances of the [Three-Foot Sword] had been passed down for many years; they naturally all recognized this technique.

Swish!

The sword-light suddenly appeared, carrying an invincible aura of majesty and power. Although the bird-of-paradise and the divine dragon mutually reinforced each other, filling each other with power and flexibility, in the face of this sword attack, which seemed to fill the world with its aura...they were still chopped into two halves, completely destroyed.

“The third stance of the [Three-Foot Sword]?” Chen Jin’s eyes were filled with disbelief as well. “Impossible. This is completely impossible. There’s no way his swordplay can be this powerful. He’s just joined recently; how could he have already comprehended the third stance of the [Three-Foot Sword]? And even if he did master it, he still shouldn’t be a match for me.”

“I reached the peak of the Wanxiang level long ago, and have the support of the Cloudwind Formation. The treasures used to form this formation, my father personally gathered for me...this formation is formed from 108 high-grade Earth-ranked magic treasures. Their power is definitely no weaker than a divine ability’s.” Chen Jin shook his head, his eyes filled with disbelief. “Although his swordplay is powerful, the third stance of the [Three-Foot Sword]...it should only be slightly more powerful than my attacks.”

He was, after all, one of the top ten figures of the third generation disciples. He knew exactly how strong the [Three-Foot Sword] was. The fourth stance of the [Three-Foot Sword] was comparable in power to complete mastery over a Dao Path. The third stance, however, was a level lower in might.

In the Black-White College, only Holyfire, the Sloppy Daoist, and a very few others were at a higher level of comprehension than Ning. The power of this sword attack alone was already enough for Ning to rank alongside Chen Jin and the Rainbowflame Fairy, Yu Wei, as one of the top ten disciples of the third generation.

“Hmph.” Ning let out a cold laugh. It seemed as though Chen Jin found this to be unfathomable?

Chen Jin’s ‘Cloudwind Formation’ had been famous for many years, but Ning’s own [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] was also extremely powerful. By relying on the nine Nethercold swords, Ning was capable of unleashing tremendous power as well, and thus had been able to suppress his foe.

“Impossible. You, a brat from a backwater clan...how can you compare

to me?" Chen Jin's face was filled with savagery. "I'm definitely going to beat you to your knees. Beat you until you submit!"

This was the only thought in Chen Jin's mind. He had to defeat Ji Ning; he had to!

"Cloudwind Worldchains!" Chen Jin let out a furious howl. But right at this moment, a pair of black wings suddenly appeared on Ning's back. The black wings trembled, and Ning instantly charged forward like a streak of light.

At this moment, many chains of azure light and golden light were sweeping forward, seeking to wrap around Ning.

Slash! Ning's Darknorth sword flashed out. Ning's Fiendgod body had already reached the tenth stage; he was comparable to a normal late-stage Wanxiang Adept Fiendgod, and he was using his divine ability, the [Starseizing Hand]! Ning would even dare give Holyfire a battle, much less this Chen Jin!

"Rumble..." The azure chains and golden chains were completely shattered.

"No..." Chen Jin, shocked, wanted to dodge. But how could he possibly do so?! Ning's left hand suddenly stretched out like the hand of a Fiendgod, grabbing Chen Jin around his throat, clenching around it. Chen Jin gurgled but was unable to speak. His eyes were filled with shock and horror.

"Who is the pile of shit?" Ning, his hand around Chen Jin's throat, barked coldly, "Tell me...who is the pile of shit?"

*

1. Mentioned before, but this is an idiom.

Chapter 26: Chen Jin's Threat

Chen Jin was being choked by the throat. Ning's left hand appeared ordinary, but it contained power that was capable of tearing apart mountains; there was no way Chen Jin could struggle at all.

"No...no..." Chen Jin's eyes were bloodshot. This was humiliation. His throat was being choked by Ning; he felt humiliated, like he had never felt humiliated before.

"You don't know the answer?" Ning continued to grip Chen Jin by the throat. He said coldly, "Then I'll tell you the answer. YOU are the pile of shit!"

Although they were fellow disciples, Ning felt nothing but boundless distaste for Chen Jin. Ninelotus and Chen Jin were nothing more than old friends...what business was it of Chen Jin as to who Ninelotus wished to become Dao-Companions with? Because Ninelotus was interested in Ning, Chen Jin was going to try to vent all of his anger on him? He had held Ning in no regard at all.

"If it weren't for the fact that we are forbidden from committing fratricide, I wouldn't let you off this easily." Ning continued to clench Chen Jin by the throat.

"You'd dare to kill me? Do you dare? Do you dare?" Chen Jin stared at Ning, eyes filled with madness.

"Kill you? Kill you, then be punished by the College?" Ning shook his head and let out a cold laugh. "You aren't worth it!" And then, Ning swung his arm, exploding forth with the might of his Fiendgod body and throwing Chen Jin out like a meteor into the distance.

The events which had transpired in midair caused Ji Ninefire, Granny Shadow, and the others on Brightheart Island to feel incomparably nervous.

"He's grown stronger, stronger than in the past." Ninefire's eyes were blazing with heat. "It's only been a few years...although in the past he

was already able to easily slay a Wanxiang Adept, Adept Xu Li was incomparably weaker than this student of the Black-White College. However...even this powerful disciple of the Black-White College was easily defeated by Ji Ning. Ji Ning's advancement speed is simply too fast. If this continues...in a few more decades, what will he be like?"

"Young master..." Autumn Leaf watched quietly as well, eyes filled with excitement.

"Too formidable." Qingqing blinked, somewhat dazed. Ning's performance this time was clearly far stronger than his previous one against the Dragonwhale King. "No wonder, despite my countless strokes of good fortune, I remain so much weaker than him. His rate of advancement is simply too monstrous."

.....

Chen Jin shot down from the skies like a meteor, smashing into the waters of Serpentwing Lake and arousing a wave that was three hundred meters high. However, he quickly managed to steady himself.

"Flowcloud." The fiery-robed, bare-footed Holyfire walked over the waves, moving towards him.

"Uncle Fire." Chen Jin lowered his head, an incomparably ugly look on his face. He had never imagined...that he would lose so disastrously!

He had wanted to let Ninelotus see how powerful he was, and how worthless Ji Ning was! He had wanted to completely dominate and trample this Ji Ning, so as to give vent to his anger. Reality, however, was completely different from what he had anticipated. He hadn't defeated his enemy; instead, he had been completely crushed.

"Ji Ning's innate talent is indeed monstrous," Holyfire sighed softly. "In the past, when I watched him battle our fellow disciples in the Dao Debates for the first time, I knew that he was monstrously talented...but it seems I still underestimated him. Perhaps our Black-White College is going to produce yet another senior apprentice-brother Sloppy."

"Him? As if!" Chen Jin couldn't help but grit his teeth. The Sloppy

Daoist...he was universally acknowledged as the number one figure amongst the third generation disciples of the Black-White College. Although he had trained for many years, the Sloppy Daoist was someone who only became more outstanding as the years went on. Generally speaking, Immortal cultivators would find their rate of improvement lessen as time went on, but the opposite was true for the Sloppy Daoist; he seemed to contain endless, inexhaustible potential, causing him to make one breakthrough after another. His combat power was even more incomparably shocking. Even Fiendgod practitioners like Holyfire and the various reincarnated Immortals were all completely convinced of his superiority.

In this moment, Holyfire had the feeling that this Ji Ning's potential was enough to make him the next 'Sloppy Daoist'.

"Senior apprentice-brother Sloppy is like a raging wave that continues to surge forward, building up power and becoming increasingly mighty as it moves forward," Holyfire said. "As for this Ji Ning, he's like a sharp sword, capable of chopping through all obstacles, allowing him to advance at an inconceivable speed. This sort of astonishing speed...even the reincarnated Immortals in our Black-White College aren't able to advance at such a rate. He's simply too monstrous!"

Chen Jin gritted his teeth. The more Holyfire praised Ning, the more miserable he felt.

"Now, do you understand?" Holyfire looked at him.

"Understand?" Chen Jin looked at the distant Ji Ning, but his heart felt extremely miserable. He felt stifled! Enraged! Unrepentant!

He had wooed Ninelotus for many years, and his jealousy had transformed into rage! He had wanted to viciously pummel Ning and give vent to his rage, then leave in a carefree, relaxed manner. But instead, he had been dominated by Ning, causing his pent-up anger to cause him to feel even more miserable...this sort of agony caused Chen Jin to understand that a shadow had fallen over his heart!

"I understand." Chen Jin nodded, staring towards the distant Ning.

Holyfire nodded slightly as well.

"He, Ji Ning, has cast a shadow over my heart. Unless I defeat him, unless I dominate him, or unless he dies...it will be very hard for me to wipe out the anger in my mind." Chen Jin gritted his teeth. "I've never been humiliated like this in my life. I've never felt so stifled, so angry before."

"You..." Holyfire was astonished. He had thought that thanks to this defeat, Chen Jin would regain his calm clarity of mind, but instead...Chen Jin was sinker deeper and deeper into the morass.

"This is terrible." Holyfire instantly understood his mistake. He had thought too highly of Chen Jin. Chen Jin and Ninelotus were of the same age; they were both very young, and were both proud, pampered scions of their clans; thus, they had never suffered much. In addition, Chen Jin himself truly was also an extremely, astonishingly talented individual; this was why, even when Ninelotus had been at the Zifu Disciple stage, he had already become one of the top ten members of the third generation disciples.

He was extremely talented, and so had always been praised by others! The elders within his clan had also encouraged him to woo Ninelotus and become her Dao-Companion; after all, Ninelotus was the next leader of the Dongyan clan, an ancient clan that was even more powerful than the Chen clan and which was spread over three commanderies.

Because he himself truly did like her, and because of the encouragement of his elders, and because of his self-confidence, Chen Jin had always believed that eventually, he would become Ninelotus' Dao-Companion! For her sake, he even chose to join the Black-White College... he truly believed that he had already sacrificed enough for her.

But...

First, Ninelotus had chosen Ning, causing him to feel completely stunned, jealous, and angry. He had planning to release his anger on Ning, but instead was completely crushed...this sort of humiliation was something he had never felt before in his entire life.

“Ning has cast a shadow over my heart.” Chen Jin understood this point; he was an extremely intelligent person, and upon realizing this, he immediately grew frantic. “I want to become a Primal Daoist, and then become an Immortal. I have to disperse this shadow. I have to!”

“What should I do? What should I do? Defeat him? Kill him?” Chen Jin couldn’t come up with any ideas. Just now, they had already fought each other; he was no match for Ning. As for causing Ning to die? Ning was a disciple of the Black-White College, and the senior disciple of Immortal Diancai. Who would dare kill him?

“What should I do?!” Chen Jin shook his head. “No. I must immediately disperse this shadow.” The humiliation and stifled rage which he felt caused him to feel extremely agonized. He knew that these emotions would have an enormous impact on his Immortal cultivation...but he wasn’t able to sever this emotion.

Knowing the problem was one thing; being able to address it was another.

“Ji Ning!” Chen Jin suddenly raised his head, staring towards Ning and Ninelotus, who were chatting in midair. A savage light flashed through his eyes, and with a swoosh, he immediately soared into the air once more.

.....

Ninelotus was in a dazed state right now. She had no idea that Ning had such tremendous power. Chen Jin was one of the top ten third generation disciples of the Black-White College, but he had been defeated so cleanly by Ning. Didn’t that mean...that in the Black-White College, only the likes of Holyfire and those few who had completely mastered a Dao Path were a match for him?

“Ji Ning, you...how did you become so strong?” Once her words came out, Ninelotus began to laugh at herself for saying such childish words. She hurriedly changed her words, saying, “You defeated Chen Jin...I imagine that he should leave now.”

“I hope he has come to his senses.” Ning turned to look downwards, but

as soon as his words came out...a streak of light shot upwards from the ground. It was Chen Jin.

Chen Jin flew into the air, staring towards Ning and Ninelotus. He let out a cold laugh. "Ji Ning."

Ning smirked. "Want another fight?"

Chen Jin could feel his anger begin to blaze up again, but he forced it down and growled, "Ji Ning, I urge you to leave Ninelotus."

"Leave?" Ning felt quite amused.

Ninelotus sighed. "Chen Jin, you had best leave."

At this moment, Holyfire flew up towards them as well. However, he just stood to one side, watching calmly and not saying anything. He hadn't been able to help Chen Jin; instead, a shadow had been cast over Chen Jin's heart. In truth...Holyfire felt rather vexed.

Chen Jin was looking at Ji Ning. He said in a cold voice, "You are indeed talented...but so what if you are powerful? Your clan, the Ji clan, is too weak...it doesn't even have a single Wanxiang Adept. Annihilating this sort of tribe is simply too easy, as easy as blowing a speck of dust."

Ning's face sank. "What do you mean by this!" Ning said in a cold voice.

"You know exactly what I mean!" Chen Jin looked at Ning. "You had best leave Ninelotus. Otherwise...don't blame me for being vicious! I don't even need to do anything personally; I have plenty of tools at my disposal for dealing with a small clan like the Ji clan."

Ning's face was ashen, the color of iron. Threatening his clan? For the sake of the clan...his father, the Patriarch, and the others all had been willing to sacrifice their lives. Although, due to his former life, Ning didn't care as much about the clan as his parents and his elders, because of their influence, he still cared quite a bit about it.

"You..." A killing desire began to surge within Ning's mind. However, the Black-White College restricted its disciples from committing fratricide.

"I know that you are a Raindragon Guard, and that ten thousand kilometers of the territory of the Ji clan is protected by them." Chen Jin looked at Ning. "Anyone who dares violate your territory will definitely suffer retaliation from the Raindragon Guard! However, in this vast world, there are still many forces that don't care at all about the Raindragon Guard...such as those criminals which the Raindragon Guard pursue. They are already wanted criminals; they won't be worried about offending the Raindragon Guard!"

Ning's gaze flashed with a cold light as he listened.

"It will have nothing to do with me. The ones who will annihilate your Ji clan will be those wanted criminals." Chen Jin looked at Ning. "Honestly. It will have nothing to do with me at all."

Ning, as well, understand...that the so-called 'iron rule of law' was something which the supreme clans were capable of avoiding or skirting around. The Raindragon Guard operated on the basis of proof; without proof, the Raindragon Guard wouldn't do anything to Chen Jin.

Chen Jin looked at Ning, then said coldly, "Make your choice. Do you choose Ninelotus, or do you choose your clan?"

Ninelotus was enraged. "Chen Jin, you..."

"He's cast a shadow over my heart. To get rid of it, I will stop at nothing. Ninelotus, you won't be able to stop me." Chen Jin looked towards Ning. "Ji Ning, what will you choose? Speak!"

BOOM!!!!

The black wings behind Ning's back suddenly flashed, and he transformed into a streak of lightning as he charged straight towards Chen Jin.

"HALT!" Holyfire roared.

"F*CK OFF!" Ning let out a savage roar back, and a crushing wave of divine will smashed outwards, striking directly against the soul of Holyfire, who wanted to intervene and block him. Although Holyfire was powerful, he wasn't a reincarnated Immortal, and although both his soul

and his Dao-heart were powerful, he still felt his soul tremble.

That moment's tremble...made him too late!

Chen Jin, whose soul had also been struck, wasn't able to even use any magic treasures before Ning's hand once more clenched around his throat.

Ning, his left hand clenched around Chen Jin's larynx, began delivering blows with his right hand. "SLAP!" "SLAP!" "SLAP!" "SLAP!" "SLAP!" "SLAP!" He viciously slapped Chen Jin on the face, and in a single breath, he delivered tens of slaps. "Threaten me? You dare THREATEN me? To boast of annihilating MY clan? You deserve to die. To DIE!"

Chen Jin's face instantly began to swell.

"I'll give you two choices." Ning came to a halt, giving a sideways glance to the distant Holyfire. "Senior apprentice-brother Holyfire, don't come any closer, or I'll immediately kill him." Holyfire was shocked.

Ning then continued to look towards Chen Jin. "You have two choices. The first choice is for you to swear an oath to the Dao of the Heavens that you will never cause any harm in any fashion to my Ji clan; otherwise, your soul will instantly be shattered. The other choice...is for me to shatter your soul right now. DECIDE!"

"You dare...you actually dare kill one of your fellow disciples?!" Chen Jin stared at him.

"You threatened to annihilate my clan. You tell me; would I dare kill you or not?" Ning stared at him. "Swear an oath to the Dao of the Heavens. Otherwise, I'll shatter your soul right now."

Chapter 27: Traversing the Immortal Path Together

"You..." Chen Jin stared at Ji Ning, his eyes filled with astonishment. Previously, Ning had appeared to be a very courteous, handsome, slim young man, but now, he was no longer masking the killing intent in his eyes. "If...if I don't swear an oath to the Dao of the Heavens...he'll kill me. He'll definitely kill me!"

Correct.

Ning did indeed desire to kill him now. He absolutely wouldn't permit his own clan, the Ji clan, to face annihilation. Whether for the sake of his father, the sake of those clansmen who he cared about, or because he felt a strong sense of belonging for the clan, Ning would definitely do everything he could to preserve the clan.

"Even if I commit fratricide against a fellow disciple and violate the laws of the school, so what! I'll accept the punishment!" This was what Ning was thinking to himself.

Although the school did indeed forbid fratricide, if he actually were to kill Chen Jin...in carrying out any punishment, the school would still first investigate the details of the situation. For example, if a disciple of the College sought to kill another disciple, could it be that the second disciple would not be allowed to fight back? Thus, this rule against fratricide was an internal rule of the College, and the exact punishment for violators would be determined by the College.

Chen Jin had threatened to annihilate the Ji clan...it was understandable for Ning to desire to kill him. The College wouldn't go so far as to destroy his Zifu; however, he would most likely be sentenced to go into a confinement of atonement for three hundred years, at the very least.

"What do you choose?" Ning stared at Chen Jin.

The distant Holyfire felt quite startled and nervous as well. "This Ji Ning...he actually is capable of using divine soul attacks. It seems he

must have reached the divine sense level long ago...and he's also extremely strong! Chen Jin has fallen into his hands, and he can kill him with a thought; there's no way I can save him in time."

He felt somewhat confident in being able to deal with Ji Ning. However...his advantage in power over Ning was still limited; it could be said that the two of them were on the same general level of power. To rescue Chen Jin from Ning's hands? It clearly wasn't possible.

"I, I..." Chen Jin's entire body was quivering slightly; he felt both agonized and humiliated. He finally spat out a phrase that he would never forget for the rest of his life. "I am willing to swear an oath to the Dao of the Heavens!"

"Whew..." Holyfire let out a sigh of relief. The distant Ninelotus, watching this, also let out a sigh of relief. She had been nervous this entire time, because this entire problem was due to her. Although she herself was innocent in her actions, she still felt nervous and ashamed.

"I'll speak first. Repeat the words that I say in swearing your oath to the Dao of the Heavens. You are not permitted to change a single word!" Ning continued to grip Chen Jin by the neck as he said coldly, "Listen clearly. I, Chen Jin, swear an oath right now, with the Dao of the Heavens as my witness..."

"I, Chen Jin, swear an oath right now, with the Dao of the Heavens as my witness..." Although Chen Jin was unwilling, he still repeated every single word.

Invisible ripples of power descended. These were ripples generated by the most supreme of Daos, the Heavenly Daos. This meant that this oath had been officially acknowledged by the Dao of the Heavens. Upon violating this oath, one would have to face the punishment of the Dao! Even an Immortal who violated such an oath would immediately suffer a retributive attack, and if the Immortal had originally sworn that a violation of the oath would cause his soul to be destroyed, then his soul would indeed be destroyed and dispersed.

"...and if I violate this oath, then let the soul of myself, Chen Jin,

immediately be destroyed and dispersed, never to be reincarnated again.” Chen Jin gritted his teeth as he stared at Ning. “Junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, are you satisfied?”

Ning let out a cold laugh, then swung his hand. Swoosh! He tossed Chen Jin far away from him. This time, Chen Jin managed to stabilize himself in midair. He gave Ning a cold glare.

“If you want to act against me, do your best,” Ning said. “If you can invite any experts to come help you, I, Ji Ning, will be here waiting for you.” Ning stared hard at him. “But when you come to deal with me, prepare to suffer my reprisal!”

“Aren’t you a piece of work.” Chen Jin gritted his teeth. Of course he wanted to kill Ji Ning. But...he couldn’t!

He was, after all, just a disciple of the Chen clan with a bit of status; he wasn’t even the heir who was in line to become the next clan leader! His father was merely a Primal Daoist...even if an Immortal of his clan was somehow willing to give him face and help him, how could that Immortal possibly go kill the disciple of Immortal Diancai, a monstrously talented genius of the Black-White College?

For the sake of its own survival, a clan would definitely not act in rash, violent, dangerous ways. A clan which did act in such a way wouldn’t be able to survive for too long!

“Let’s go.” Holyfire flew to his side. Chen Jin glanced at Holyfire. Although his heart still blazed with rage, there was nothing he could do. All he could do was nod. “Fine.”

“Ji Ning.” Chen Jin, before leaving, gave Ning a final glance, then said in a low voice, “Let me offer you a word of advice. Ninelotus is the next leader of the Dongyan clan; this has already been set in stone. The Dongyan clan is an ancient clan that is even more powerful than our Black-White College. Not just anyone can become the Dao-Companion to the next leader of a clan like this. Even I, in terms of background alone, don’t quite match up; that’s why I still have to frantically train. As for you? Hmph...”

"No need to worry yourself about that," Ning said calmly.

"Hmph."

Chen Jin and Holyfire once more mounted that fiery red cloud, transforming into a streak of light and disappearing into the distant horizons. The only figures now left in the skies of Serpentwing Lake were Ning and Ninelotus.

"Ji Ning." Ninelotus stood there, a look of guilt on her face. "It's all my fault...I've caused you to gain another enemy."

This was the way of human interactions in the world.

Prior to this, Ji Ning and Chen Jin were fellow disciples of the same school who had never met. In the blink of an eye, however, Ji Ning had become a fiend in Chen Jin's heart, casting a shadow over it! Similarly, because Chen Jin had threatened to annihilate the Ji clan, Ning now viewed him as his hated enemy.

"This isn't your fault, senior apprentice-sister," Ning said with a laugh. "Don't worry. Chen Jin is nothing more than a dancing clown. He might be able to hop around smugly for a time...but what of it? What can he do to me?"

He was one of the two Sword Immortals of the entire Black-White College! The other, naturally, was his own master, Immortal Diancai.

"Right. Earlier, you demonstrated the third stance of the [Three-Foot Sword], the 'Sudden Sword Light,'" Ninelotus said softly. "If the Black-White College was to learn of this, the degree of importance they view you with would skyrocket even more. The [Three-Foot Sword] is the most powerful sword art of the Black-White College, and you are a genius of the Dao of the Sword; the Black-White College will definitely spare no expense in training you!"

"The Chen clan is comparable to the Black-White College, but it's in the Highwater Commandery; the amount of influence it has in Stillwater Commandery is quite low. In addition, Chen Jin's status in the Chen clan is fairly ordinary...and so you truly don't have much to worry about." Ning

nodded as he listened.

Both of them were chatting in midair, and standing very close to each other. When Ninelotus spoke, Ning could almost feel her breath. This caused Ning, who had never before had a relationship with a woman, to suddenly have an impetuous feeling...which was only strengthened by the fact that just now, he had defeated his 'rival in love', Chen Jin. Ning suddenly stretched his hand out, grasping Ninelotus' hand.

Ninelotus' hand was very soft, as though it were made out of water.

"Eh?" Ninelotus was somewhat caught off guard.

"Be my Dao-Companion," Ning said.

For a moment, Ninelotus' mind was thrown into a state of chaos. She had actually been hesitating this entire time; during the past year, she had slowly grown more certain of herself, but she was, by nature, a cautious person. She had been planning to wait and watch for a few more years, but in the face of Ning's sudden 'attack'...she didn't know what to say or do.

"The path of Immortal cultivation is one filled with pitfalls and traps. But we would at least have a Dao-Companion as we traverse this path." Ning looked at Ninelotus. "Senior apprentice-sister, are you willing to accompany me in traversing this path of Immortal cultivation for a thousand years...for ten thousand years...and for eternity?"

Ninelotus' eyes suddenly turned red. She nodded gently. "Hahaha...." Ning began to laugh joyfully.

"Remember what you said," Ninelotus said, looking at Ning. "We shall walk this path of Immortal cultivation together. A thousand years...ten thousand years...an eternity."

"Right." Ning nodded.

Their gazes met.

As for Autumn Leaf, who was watching this scene from the distant Brightheart Island, she revealed a hint of a smile as well. "The young

master...has finally found his love.”

.....

The Black-White College of Stillwater City. Adept Flowcloud, also known as Chen Jin, had returned to his own estate. He sat there by himself, drinking one cup of wine after another.

“Ji Ning.”

“Ji Ning.”

Chen Jin muttered this name repeatedly, a terrifying look in his eyes. The woman he had loved had been taken from him, and he had first been defeated, then been choked and forced to swear an oath to the Dao of the Heavens. All of these things caused Chen Jin to feel a boundless amount of hatred towards Ning, but...there was nothing he could do. Ning had been training for far fewer years than him, but Ning’s rate of advancement caused even Chen Jin to feel tongue-tied and speechless.

“I won’t be able to catch up to him. I won’t be a match for him.” Chen Jin couldn’t even rouse himself to fight back.

“What should I do?”

Agony filled Chen Jin’s heart.

“Right!” Chen Jin’s eyes suddenly let up. “Although Ninelotus won’t be mine, Ji Ning’s clan is far inferior to mine. Although he is a monstrously talented person...to an ancient, massive clan such as the Dongyan clan, they won’t care about that at all. Right...I imagine that the Dongyan clan doesn’t know about Ninelotus and Ji Ning yet. Then...I’ll give Ji Ning ‘a hand’!”

“Once the Dongyan clan learns of this, they will definitely prevent the two from being together. Definitely!”

Chen Jin was a disciple of a major clan as well; he knew very well how major clans carried out their affairs. Everything was done for the sake of the clan! The same was true for the leader of the clan as well. Only someone whose status in the clan was like Ji Ning’s status to the Ji clan,

whose personal status and influence completely eclipsed the entire clan itself, was able to surpass the importance of the clan. In those cases, the entire clan would move according to the wishes of that person.

Clearly, Ninelotus, by herself, couldn't possibly surpass the entirety of the Dongyan clan in importance!

"Let's do this." Swoosh. Chen Jin transformed into a streak of light, once more departing from the Black-White College.

.....

The Dongyan clan was an extremely mighty clan; since it stretched over three commanderies, it naturally had a local branch in Stillwater City. That very day, Chen Jin spread news of Ninelotus and Ji Ning to this branch.

The Primal Daoist in charge of running this branch didn't dare to be negligent at all in handling this affair; this news, after all, involved their next leader, 'Ninelotus'.

Very soon...the news made its way back to the primary headquarters of the Dongyan clan in Highwater Commandery, in the Dongyan Mountains. This was a mountain range that spanned more than a hundred thousand kilometers, and which was densely packed with countless structures and buildings. The Dongyan clan's population was calculated in the hundreds of millions, and all of the clansmen lived here. In addition, this mountain range was also filled with countless ancient formations.

This was, after all, an ancient clan that spanned three commanderies, one which had produced multiple Celestial Immortals. But of course, too much time had passed; although Celestial Immortals had infinite lifespans, they might fall or die. No one knew for certain if the Dongyan clan still had any living Celestial Immortals.

In terms of their roots and their foundation, the Dongyan clan definitely surpassed the eight major powers of the Stillwater Commandery; they were actually close to the Northmont clan in power! Perhaps the only major difference between them and the Northmont clan was that they had never been enfeoffed with a marquisdom.

“Little Yun has chosen a Dao-Companion?”

“What’s her Dao-Companion’s name?”

“Ji Ning?”

This news instantly caused a major upheaval amongst the high-ranking members of the Dongyan clan.

Chapter 28: Taken Away

"Bring Little Yun back here!" An unfathomably old and reclusive patriarch of the Dongyan clan gave the order personally.

"Yes, Forefather." A Loose Immortal, 'Immortal Norshok', responded with great respect. That very day, he led a group of Loose Immortals in an awe-inspiring display as they left the Dongyan Mountains of the Highwater Commandery.

.....

The warm spring had come, and the flowers had bloomed. A leaf-shaped boat was lazily floating about on the surface of Serpentwing Lake. Atop the boat were only two people; Ji Ning and Ninelotus. In the past, the two had never made their feelings clear to each other, but upon both of them acknowledging each other as Dao-Companions, upon acknowledging that they would continue to accompany each other as companions for the rest of their long life on the Immortal path...their hearts only grew closer.

The two sat there, facing each other atop the boat. In front of them was a table, and on the table was some Immortal wine. This Immortal wine had naturally been provided by Ninelotus. Ninelotus had an extraordinary background, and the cups, wine, and various other items she carried with her were all things which Ning had never seen before.

"What sort of wine is this?" Ning held an exquisite jade wine cup in his hand, lightly tasting the wine. Instantly, his entire body became filled with a pleasurable feeling, while his heartrate began to quicken.

"This is known as 'Immortal Dong's Wine'." Ninelotus held a cup of her own. "This wine actually has quite a history to it. In another one of the major worlds, one which is comparable in size and scope to this world of ours which is under the control of the Grand Xia Dynasty, an Immortal maiden from the Heaven Realm descended upon it. By a chance encounter, she met with an ordinary Immortal cultivator of that world, 'Dong You'...the two entered into a secret relationship, wishing to

accompany each other forever. Unfortunately, that Immortal maiden had an extremely exalted status in the Heaven realm; the elders behind her would absolutely not permit her, an exalted Celestial Immortal, to become Dao-Companions with an ordinary Immortal cultivator. Thus, they forced them apart.”

Ning immediately let out a moved sigh. An Immortal maiden of the Heaven Realm? A cultivator of the mortal realm?

“Afterwards, this Dong You swore an oath that he would ascend to the Heaven Realm and take back his Dao-Companion.” Ninelotus said softly, “A mortal cultivator actually dared to claim he would go to the Heaven Realm and take his Dao-Companion back...this was simply inconceivable. But Dong You actually managed to overcome all of his difficulties, conquer the Heavenly tribulation, and become a carefree, eternal Celestial Immortal. He even became one of the leading figures of his major world, and then...he led the many Immortals of his major world to charge towards and attack the Heaven Realm. In the end...the powers behind the Immortal maiden lowered their heads. He took her back...and their legend became known throughout the Three Realms.”

Ning sighed in amazement. He had become a Celestial Immortal, then led a group of Immortals from his major world to assault the Heavens themselves?

“Dong You is also known as Immortal Eastroam, and has become an awe-inspiringly famous figure in the Three Realms. Even I, as a child, heard stories of him.” Ninelotus sighed with emotion, “And this Immortal wine was the wine concoted by Immortal Eastroam, Dong You. Many Immortals of many major worlds love this wine, and my Dongyan clan managed to acquire a bit. I carry three canteens of it with me, but have never tasted it before.” After speaking, Ninelotus cast Ning a glance.

There was something she left out; the reason she had never tasted it was because she had always planned to one day enjoy it with her own Dao-Companion. This Immortal Dong’s Wine was a sort of testament to fidelity in love, and so maidens of the royal Xia clan, the Dongyan clan, and other supreme clans liked to collect this wine and enjoy it with their

Dao-Companions.

Ning, in turn, understood what Ninelotus was thinking. He took another small sip of this Immortal wine. The rousing feeling in his heart brought by the wine did indeed feel similar to the feeling one might have upon seeing one's beloved woman.

"Eh?" Ning suddenly frowned, raising his head. Ninelotus did the same.

In the formerly completely empty sky, an enormous, completely black warship had appeared. The warship was extremely wide, and it was covered with fluttering flags with two characters atop it; 'Dong' and 'Yan'. The warship emanated an aura of might, as though it were capable of battling the heavens and the earth.

Rows of armored Dao-soldiers stood atop the deck of the warship, and the eyes of these Immortal cultivators were both cold and dominating. Each of them was at least at the Wanxiang Adept level, and they were trained to a high level.

Waves of wind crushed outward from the warship as it soared towards Serpentwing Lake. The invisible ripples of wind caused the surface of the distant Serpentwing Lake to generate massive waves, and the little boat Ning and Ninelotus were seated on were lifted up as well.

"In you go." Ning immediately collected the little boat. He and Ninelotus stood on the surface of Serpentwing Lake. The lakewater around them immediately grew calm. Although awe-inspiringly massive waves crashed down nearby, the area immediately next to them was completely calm and placid.

"What's going on?" Ning sent to the nearby Ninelotus, "Senior apprentice-sister, this is a warship of your Dongyan clan, but it seems they come with ill intentions."

"It must be that the clan has learned of our affairs. But...very few know about you and me. Luo Qing knew more than a year ago; if she notified the clan, the clan would've come long ago...for them to only come today means that it was most likely Chen Jin who told them." A hint of worry appeared on Ninelotus' face. "The day I worried the most about has

finally come..."

Ning looked at Ninelotus. "Senior apprentice-sister," he said softly.

"I'm the next leader of the Dongyan clan. I refuse to believe that I won't even be permitted to decide upon my own Dao-Companion." Ninelotus looked at Ning. "Don't worry."

Ning, however, suddenly felt an invisible pressure descend upon him. In this moment, he finally, suddenly understood the meaning of Ninelotus preparing Immortal Dong's Wine for them. "So she was telling me to be steadfast..."

The enormous warship slowly descended, landing atop the surface of Serpentwing Lake. It came to a halt directly in front of Ning and Ninelotus. In the face of this massive, three thousand meter long warship, Ning and Ninelotus seemed so small, so puny.

"Whoosh!"

An opening appeared at the head of the warship, and a wide plank automatically descended, landing on the surface of the lake. A man dressed in golden Daoist robes walked out, and behind him were nine Primal Daoists whose auras filled the skies. Behind the nine were a group of armored Wanxiang Adepts. This group of Immortal cultivators caused both the heavens and the earth to shudder; a martial force like this would be able to annihilate a sect like Snowdragon Mountain without any problems at all.

"The leader is Immortal Norshok of our Dongyan clan. Behind him are his nine Primal Daoist disciples, and behind them is the Darkane Guard of our Dongyan clan; all of them are at the Wanxiang Adept level," Ninelotus sent to him. Right at this moment, she saw that Ning's face had turned rather white. "Ji Ning, what's wrong?"

"I'm fine," Ning said softly.

Surges of terrifyingly powerful divine will were crashing against his soul.

Immortal Norshok and the nine Primal Daoists behind him had

simultaneously launched divine will attacks against him; even Ning felt it incredibly hard to endure against an attack like this. His mind was focused on silently visualizing the painting of Maiden Nuwa, and as it did, an image of Maiden Nuwa appeared in his skull, emanating golden light and causing Ning's soul to grow calm and steady, allowing him to endure the repeatedly clashes.

"Eh?" The golden-robed Immortal Norshok's forehead creased slightly. He had led such a large group over for the express purpose of shocking and awing this kid from a backwater clan, and this divine will clash was meant to teach him a long-lasting lesson. However, this young man named Ji Ning, who was just barely twenty years of age, had actually been able to withstand the divine will attacks of himself and his nine mighty disciples.

"Master, this Ji Ning's soul is quite powerful...can it be that he's a reincarnated Immortal?"

"Even if he is a reincarnated Immortal, of what use is he to our Dongyan clan?" Immortal Noshok sent a calm message back mentally.

Even the Black-White College had quite a few reincarnated Immortals within it. What were reincarnated Immortals? They were individuals who, at the Earth Immortal or Loose Immortal stage, had despaired of making any further advancements and thus had chosen to reincarnate! After reincarnating, although it would be fairly easy for them to once more train to become Earth Immortals...if they didn't succeed in becoming Celestial Immortals in their past life, it was very possible that they also wouldn't be successful in this life!

After withstanding the divine will clash and sending the enemy divine wills off, Ning understood that these people had definitely come with ill intentions!

"Little Yun." Immortal Norshok didn't even look at Ning, just looking at Ninelotus. "It's time to go back."

"Wasn't I only supposed to go back after becoming a Primal Daoist?" Ninelotus frowned. "Why must I go back so early? On whose authority?"

Her status in the clan was very high; even Immortals didn't have the authority to order her around.

"The Forefather personally gave the order for me to bring you back," Immortal Norshok said solemnly.

"The Forefather?" Ninelotus was stunned.

In some clans, on occasion, an extremely powerful person would appear, whose status was far more exalted than even that of the clan leader. Ning's status in the Ji clan was one such example! His status surpassed the Patriarch's; although he wasn't the titular clan leader, he was the true leader of the clan.

And for the Dongyan clan...the Forefather of the Dongyan clan was the true leader of the clan. He was an ancient presence that had existed for an unfathomably long period of time; his lifespan was measured in hundreds of millions of years. Anyone capable of living this long was, very naturally, not a Loose Immortal! The high level members of the Dongyan clan were all certain that the Forefather was a Celestial Immortal, but the Forefather himself had never admitted to it or publicized his status.

His true power was also a mystery; however, those few times he did display it, those so-called Loose Immortals were completely unable to even try and resist his might.

No one in the clan could go against his decrees. He was always in seclusion, and almost never interfered in clan matters, but once he gave an order, everyone would obey. Removing a clan leader from power, for the Forefather of the Dongyan clan, took nothing more than a single sentence. From this, one could see how exalted his status was!

"The Forefather? I, I..." Ninelotus gritted her teeth. One of the reasons why she had been selected as the next clan leader was because of the Forefather; the Forefather loved her and doted on her dearly.

"I'll go back with you," Ninelotus said.

Immortal Norshok nodded gently. He had never even thought about Ninelotus resisting; in the Dongyan clan, there was no one who would

dare to disobey the Forefather's orders! Unless, that is, they were truly about to betray the clan.

Ninelotus looked at the nearby Ning. She sent mentally to him, "Wait for me."

Ning nodded gently. "Right."

"Let's go," Immortal Norshok urged. Ninelotus immediately walked towards Immortal Norshok; those nine Primal Daoists and the Darkane Guard all clustered around her, escorting her onto the warship.

Immortal Norshok turned his head, giving Ning a glance. He sent a direct mental message. "Your name is Ji Ning? I think you had best wake up and understand that Little Yun is not an ordinary disciple of an ordinary clan. If she was an ordinary woman of the Dongyan clan, becoming Dao-Companions with her would be fine, but she has been chosen to be the next leader of our Dongyan clan. And you...you aren't worthy of her." After speaking, he gave Ning a cold glance, then followed Ninelotus into the warship.

Ninelotus looked down from the warship.

Ning looked up from the lake.

Their gazes intersected in the air.

"Rumble..." The air around them began to roil about, then the enormous warship vanished into thin air.

Ning watched Ninelotus and the warship disappear. For a moment, he felt empty inside.

"Not worthy?" Ning murmured these words to himself. The resolve in his eyes only grew stronger.

"Young master."

"Ning, son."

From afar, a green leaf-type magic treasure flew over. Atop it was Autumn Leaf, the Whitewater Hound, and Qingqing; they had seen these events occur from far away, but due to the distance, they hadn't been able

to overhear what had been said. Still, they clearly saw that Ninelotus had been taken away.

"Young master, are you alright?" Autumn Leaf was extremely nervous.

"It's fine. The elders of her clan miss her and want to see her, that's all," Ning said.

Chapter 29: The Forefather of the Dongyan Clan

Highwater Commandery. The Dongyan Mountains.

This was the headquarters of the Dongyan clan. Outsiders were completely forbidden from entering. An enormous, awe-inspiring warship was in the azure skies of the mountains, flying through them.

“I’m back.” Ninelotus looked at the distant, familiar mountains. This was her homeland.

“Little Yun, let’s go. Go meet the Forefather,” Immortal Norshok said. Ninelotus nodded obediently.

Immediately, a cloud suddenly appeared out of nowhere. Immortal Norshok, controlling and riding upon the cloud, took Ninelotus directly into the forbidden lands of the Dongyan Mountains.

“Is the Forefather truly going to stop me?” Ninelotus mused silently to herself. Even when she was a child, the Forefather had doted on her; in turn, she absolutely worshipped the Forefather, and was extremely obedient towards him.

Whoosh.

They continued to fly forward through one forbidden region after another of the Dongyan clan. The guards of these locations, upon seeing Immortal Norshok and Ninelotus, did not move to stop them.

After flying for a period of time, they arrived at a secluded, ordinary-looking gorge. Within the gorge, a small river was flowing, and by the sides of the river, there was a man dressed in plain blue clothes. The man sat there, fishing calmly.

“Forefather.” Immortal Norshok landed, then called out to him respect. Ninelotus looked towards the blue-robed man, veneration in her eyes as she, too, called out gently, “Forefather.”

“Norshok, you can go for now. Little Yun, stay with me.” The blue-robed

continued to fish, not even turning to look at them.

“Yes.” Immortal Norshok respectfully departed.

Only the blue-robed man and Ninelotus were left within the gorge. Ninelotus was very familiar with this gorge, because she had spent her childhood here. Because of the Forefather’s support...she had been selected as the next clan leader without any disputes or struggles at all.

“Little Yun.” The blue-robed man turned to look at her, the faintest hint of a smile on his face. It made him look very friendly and amiable. He sat there, fishing, as though he were an ordinary commoner; he didn’t have the aura of a cultivator at all. But in front of this man, the entire Dongyan clan would be respectful and subservient, not daring to offend him at all.

“Forefather.” Ninelotus instantly grew nervous.

“I hear you chose a Dao-Companion,” the blue-robed man said with a laugh. “Named Ji Ning?”

“Yes.” Ninelotus nodded.

“For now, you should forget about him,” the blue-robe man instructed.

Ninelotus grew frantic. “Forefather, you chose me to be the next leader of the clan; can it be that I can’t even choose a Dao-Companion for myself? I know that our Dongyan clan needs to grow stronger, and that my choice for a Dao-Companion would ideally be a member of the royal Xia clan or one of the main lineage descendants of a marquisdom, but... even if I do choose one of them to be my Dao-Companion, the benefit it would bring to our Dongyan clan would be limited. Are you truly going to force me, Forefather?”

“Do you think I would force you?” The blue-robed man looked at her. Ninelotus was stunned.

“Even if a prince of the Grand Xia Empire became your Dao-Companion, he would only bring a limited degree of benefit to our Dongyan clan. Would I really force you over something like this?” The blue-robed man shook his head. “Ninelotus, you truly are too young.”

"But Forefather, you, you told me to forget about junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning..." Ninelotus was frantic.

The blue-robed man suddenly asked, "Do you know what it means to be Dao-Companions?"

Ninelotus hesitated for a moment. Dao-Companions?

"Dao-Companions...those who will traverse the pitfalls of the Immortal path together for a thousand years, for ten thousand years, for eternity; companions who will never leave each other. Right?" Ninelotus responded softly.

The blue-robed man let out a sigh. "Anyone can say the words. But Dao-Companions who truly support each other and never leave or abandon each other...this is incomparably rare. In my life, I have seen far too many 'Dao-Companions' betray each other, kill each other, abandon each other...far, far too many. Nothing in this world is absolute."

Ninelotus was stunned upon hearing this.

"You are too young." The blue-robed man shook his head. "That Ji Ning, he's too young as well. Are the two of you certain...that you truly understand what it means to become Dao-Companions? Do you truly know what becoming Dao-Companions means?"

"Dao-Companions...this means that you are willing to die for him!"

"Dao-Companions...this means that if Immortals or Buddhas were to try and separate you, you would slaughter Immortals and annihilate Buddhas in order to bring your Dao-Companion back."

"Dao-Companions...this means that if he dies, even if an eternity passes, you would still be unable to forget him; you would feel as though he was still alive and right by your side."

"Dao-Companions...your other half in life! Without him, your life is no longer complete!"

The blue-robed man stared at Ninelotus, a look of unfathomable ancientness in his eyes. "Are you certain...that you would be willing to die

for him? Are you certain...that for his sake, you would have the courage to slaughter Immortals and annihilate Buddhas?"

Ninelotus's mouth opened and closed a few times.

Die for him?

Battle with all the Immortals and the Buddhas of the heavens for him?

"If you are certain of these things, if you feel no hesitation at all in answering this question, then I won't stop you. I would only support you." The blue-robed man sighed. "But I can see from your eyes that you are hesitating, that you are pausing..."

"If you aren't able to treat him as the other half of your life, if you aren't able to die for him, if you don't have the courage to battle against all the Immortals and Buddhas of heaven for him...then why must you become Dao-Companions?"

"Without that degree of resolve, there's no need for you to choose a Dao-Companion."

"The path of Immortal cultivation...is a path which defies the heavens."

"You can traverse it alone. You can also traverse it with a Dao-Companion. This is an incomparably difficult path, filled with pitfalls. Thus, if you are to choose a Dao-Companion, you absolutely must choose a Dao-Companion who will truly share life and death with him; one you would die for, and one who would die for you. Otherwise...you would be better off traversing this path alone."

The blue-robed man gave Ninelotus a glance. "Ninelotus, what do you think?"

"I, I..." Ninelotus was completely stunned.

Had she been wrong?

"You are too young...and that Ji Ning is even younger than you. The two of you haven't experienced enough! You two are nowhere near close to the point of selecting Dao-Companions, because your hearts are not yet sufficiently resolved; the two of you simply feel a sort of indistinct longing

and affection for each other.” The blue-robed man shook his head. “This sort of indistinct longing and affection...it won’t last.”

“I won’t forcibly prevent you from being together with Ji Ning,” the blue-robed man said.

Upon hearing this, a hint of delight instantly appeared in Ninelotus’ eyes.

“But you must have patience. When you become a Primal Daoist, if you still feel that Ji Ning should be your Dao-Companion, than you can choose him. For now, however...you will have to endure,” the blue-robed man said.

“Wait until I’m a Primal Daoist?” Ninelotus was stunned. “How long is that going to take?”

“I’ve doted on you too much. Your Dao-heart truly is quite ordinary. Go to the Myriad Lotuses Cave. I’ll set down a formation; only when you can walk out of the Myriad Lotuses Cave will you be permitted to leave the Dongyan Mountains,” the blue-robed man instructed.

Ninelotus said frantically, “The Myriad Lotuses Cave? How am I suppose to break through a formation that you set down, Forefather?”

“This will just be a bewildering formation meant to help illuminate your Dao-heart,” the blue-robed man said, shaking his head. “No need to argue about it. Go.”

“I’m going to send someone to notify Ji Ning.” Ninelotus knew that refusal was not an option, and so she hurriedly switched tacts.

“Go,” the blue-robed man said calmly.

Ninelotus immediately boarded a lotus-shaped magic treasure, immediately departing and making arrangements for a notification to be given to Ning.

The blue-robed man watched Ninelotus leave, then gently shook his head. “She truly is too young. Still...Ruyin, she truly does look just like you. How long has it been...do you remember how the two of us fought,

shoulder-to-shoulder, in the ‘Skylight’ major world? That battle...no matter how much time passes, I’ll never forget it. Never...”

And then, he quietly went back to his fishing. His fishing hook attracted quite a number of fish to come circling around it, but the ‘hook’ was straight. It would never catch a fish.¹

*

1. This is a reference to the legend of Jiang Ziya, a ‘historical’ Chinese Immortal who fished without a hook, on the belief that the fish would come to him when they were ready, without need for a hook.

Chapter 30: Nine Years in the Blink of an Eye

In the air above Serpentwing Lake. A tall, willowy, silver-armored woman appeared, standing atop a giant sword.

“Ji Ning!” The silver-armored woman called out in a high voice. Swoosh! A wind suddenly howled forth from Brightheart Lake, and then Ji Ning appeared in midair.

“You are...?” Ji Ning looked at the silver-armored woman.

“My mistress is your ‘senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus’. Per the orders from my mistress, I have come to notify you of something,” the silver-armored woman said. Ning, actually, had already guessed that this woman had something to do with Ninelotus.

“My mistress said that she needs to remain within her clan for a time and won’t be able to come out in the near future. She asks you to wait for her patiently.” The silver-armored woman said in a cold, clear voice, “Mistress also said that the two of you could take this opportunity to consider if the two of you were perhaps too rash in deciding to become Dao-Companions.”

Ning frowned. Ninelotus had gone back to her clan and would not return? And was asking him to consider if they had decided to become Dao-Companions too rashly? What was this supposed to mean?

“I’ve delivered my message.” The silver-armored woman, after finishing, flew away on her giant sword, quickly disappearing into the horizons.

.....

Ning returned to Brightheart Island with a belly full of suspicions. Auutmn Leaf was there by the beach, quietly waiting for him. “What happened, young master?” Autumn Leaf, seeing the restless look on Ning’s face, couldn’t help but ask him.

“That was senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus’ servant, just now,” Ning

said with a frown. “She came on orders to deliver a message. Ninelotus won’t be able to leave the clan for a period of time, and also said that I should calm down and think about if we were perhaps too hasty in choosing to be Dao-Companions. What does this mean? Since we’ve already chosen to become Dao-Companions, what’s this about it being ‘too hasty’?”

In both the previous life and this one, Ning’s romantic history, or lack thereof, was completely blank.

“Young master,” Autumn Leaf said hurriedly, “I think these words don’t come from senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus. She treats you with sincerity. I imagine that the high-level members of the Dongyan clan instructed this maidservant to speak those words, so as to make you nervous. If you were to give up on your own, then they would have successfully separated the two of you.”

“Riiiight.” Ning’s eyes lit up. “You are right. This is probably their scheme. The Dongyan clan, in truth, doesn’t quite want to see myself with Ninelotus.”

Autumn Leaf, seeing Ning’s spirit rise, couldn’t help but laugh. So long as Ning was happy, she was happy.

.....

Life went on without Ninelotus for Ning. He continued to live at Serpentwing Lake. He had concluded that the words sent by Ninelotus had come from the Dongyan clan, which was seeking to cause trouble between them! Thus, Ning didn’t question Ninelotus’ dedication at all. Rather, Ning felt absolutely irritated with the Dongyan clan, and truly wanted to find a chance to shock the contemptuous clan. This, Ning was quite industrious in his training at Serpentwing lake.

Every so often, he would go into seclusion to practice his swordplay...

Every so often, he would go to the Raindragon Guard’s branch to take on some missions to chase after and kill criminals or problem-causing Diremonsters...

Every two or three years, he would make a trip into the underwater estate to meditate on the Dao in the Stellar Hall...

And oftentimes, he would just lie there on his boat, letting it drift about on the surface of Serpentwing Lake. These moments were the calmest, most peaceful moments for his soul...

.....

In the blink of an eye, nearly nine years had passed. After having killed many powerful criminals, Ning was now extremely famous.

"It's a new year." Ning stood there on his balcony, which was decorated with red lanterns, illuminating the snow that continued to fall down in this dark night.

"Young master, the dinner banquet is ready." Autumn Leaf walked over. Ning looked sideways towards Autumn Leaf. Although it had been nearly nine years, Autumn Leaf's appearance looked just as it had in the past. But perhaps because of her innate talent, despite using the many spirit-pills and medicines which Ning had provided, Autumn Leaf remained at the peak of the Xiantian level, and was still yet to establish her Zifu. The primary reason was her lack of comprehension into the Dao, and so Ning would often provide her with personal guidance. With his guidance, Autumn Leaf had begun to advance quite a bit, and most likely in a few more years, she would finally step into the Zifu level.

"Bluestone, however, is much less talented than Autumn Leaf," Ning sighed to himself. Bluestone was the little brother of Spring Grass, and Ning had once sworn an oath in front of her grave to provide him with good tutelage. Ning truly had gone all out in his efforts, and Bluestone had managed to, just barely, reach the Xiantian level. However, his rate of improvement in comprehending the Dao was far, far too slow.

Bluestone knew that there wasn't much hope for him, and so he instead asked Ning to take him to Stillwater City. He had always lived at Serpentwing Lake, and had very few life experiences; he wanted to see the legendary Stillwater City.

Ning, taking advantage of a trip to accept a mission for the Raindragon

Guard, delivered Bluestone to Northmont Baiwei's residence in Stillwater City, asking Baiwei to help take care of him.

"Let's go." Ning and Autumn Leaf were walking side-by-side in a corridor.

"Young master, the clan has sent another twelve youths over. Including that last time five years ago, as well as that very first time...a total of twenty eight youths have come," Autumn Leaf said softly. "I feel that the clan is going a bit too far. Young master, you need to spend time on your own training as well. How can you possibly have enough time to guide all of these youths?"

Ning laughed. "These youths are quite weak. Your level of insight into the sword is fairly high now; follow my instructions and go provide them with guidance."

"Me?" Autumn Leaf was surprised.

"Don't underestimate yourself," Ning instructed. "When they break through to the Xiantian level, bring them to see me. Come, let's go eat dinner together. Tonight will be the eve of the new year."

.....

The eve of the new year was a day of great celebration. But within the Kou clan, one of the six major hegemons of the Swallow Mountain Region, nobody was laughing or smiling.

The new clan leader of the Kou clan, Kou Huai gently stroked the ancient stone walls in front of him. He stared at each tile and each brick, at the courtyards and the grass. "This is the homeland of our Kou clan..." Kou Huai touched the walls and spoke in a hoarse voice, his eyes red.

Tears streamed down the face of a maiden next to him. "Father, let's go all out against the Ji clan. This is our foundation, the foundation of our clan. They are going to destroy our foundation, so let's go all out against them. At worst, both of us shall suffer injuries."

"What do you know?" Kou Huai shook his head, then raised it, staring at the snow falling from the skies. They felt very cold. "Go all out against

the Ji clan? With what? For now, let's not discuss the most powerful member of the Ji clan, Ji Ning; not a single clan in the Swallow Mountain region is capable of blocking either of those two Wanxiang Diremonsters under his command. Both of those Diremonsters are Godbeasts, and are at the peak of the Wanxiang level! They are far more powerful than ordinary peak Wanxiang Adepts. And Ji Ning himself...he is the true face of terror."

"Ji Ning." The maiden gritted her teeth. "I will definitely make the Ji clan regret this."

"Don't even think about causing the Ji clan trouble." Kou Huai shook his head. "Those incomparably vile, wicked cultivators and Diremonsters in the Stillwater Commandery region...quite a few of them were killed by him. Amongst them was a particularly notorious and evil practitioner, Adept Poisondove. Adept Poisondove was someone capable of fighting against a Primal Daoist, then escaping with his life. And yet, he ended up dying to Ji Ning. I imagine that soon afterwards, this Ji Ning will become a Primal Daoist himself."

"So what if a clan with such power takes over the entire Swallow Mountain region? Our Kou clan is so weak; if we don't move, we'll just be constantly suppressed by the Ji clan. In the end, we'll be wiped out. Moving now, on the other hand, gives us a chance to survive and flourish in another place.

"And in addition!"

"It can be said that the Ji clan has already shown us mercy. They have not, at least, embarked on a slaughter against us. They've allowed us to continue to stay here." Kou Huai let out a sigh.

Although they had been forced to hand over their official writs for their city to the Ji clan, which was tantamount to surrendering their base, Kou Huai didn't feel hatred in his heart. This was because, after any clan produced a supreme expert, they would rapidly consolidate control over their surrounding territory. The Ji clan had Ji Ning, the Whitewater Hound, and the Azure Skysnake; they had complete, overwhelming power,

and could've swept everyone away.

The Ji clan, however, had not swept anyone away. Instead, they had ‘negotiated’, allowing the various powers to voluntarily submit and decide to move. The Ji clan even gave them some buffer time, allowing them at least three but no more than ten years to depart from the Swallow Mountain region.

“Tomorrow. Tomorrow, we shall leave.” Kou Huai stroked the walls again. “Remember, child. If you are weak, you will have to lower your head. There’s no one else to blame but ourselves, for not being strong enough.”

The maiden nodded. “Tomorrow, I will go to the Thousand Rivers Sect. Father, I will definitely work hard to bring our Kou clan to prominence once more.”

“Alright.” Kou Huai looked at his daughter, his eyes filled with expectations. His daughter, his pride and joy.

However, compared to a monster like Ji Ning, she was far inferior. If his daughter was capable of becoming a Wanxiang Adept, most likely the entire Kou clan would celebrate.

.....

The eve of the new year. The City of Ten Thousand Swords.

Ji Ninefire had already retired; the current Patriarch of the Ji clan was the younger Ji Truekeep!

“The Kou clan and the Blackfire Cult, in the next three days, will depart from their commandery cities,” Truekeep said with a loud laugh. “Once they leave, our Ji clan’s power will have expanded even more.”

“They were quite obedient. They didn’t try to resist.” Ninefire smiled as he spoke.

“The difference in power was too great. They had no desire to fight back at all.” Granny Shadow was very satisfied as well. “Truekeep, once the Kou clan and the Blackfire Cult have left their commandery cities and our

Ji clan moves in, then in the Swallow Mountain region...the only remaining powers will be the garrison of the Grand Xia Dynasty and Snowdragon Mountain's branch, right?

Truekeep nodded. The Grand Xia Dynasty's garrison would definitely remain. As for the Snowdragon Mountain branch? Although Dong Ziqi and the others had died, Snowdragon Mountain had quickly sent more Zifu Disciples to enter Swallow Mountain, causing the local branch to once more flourish!

"The Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain has the main Snowdragon Mountain sect behind them. Although they aren't willing to offend our Ji clan, they aren't so afraid of us as to hand over their territory," Truekeep said with a sigh. "This will be troublesome. If we were to truly act against the local branch of Snowdragon Mountain, I'm worried that they will send some Wanxiang Adepts over from the main sect."

Snowdragon Mountain didn't wish to offend Ji Ning, whose potential was unlimited. But they weren't actually afraid of him! They didn't expand their territory in Swallow Mountain, but continued to stubbornly remain within their previous territory. They wouldn't launch any attacks, but if the Ji clan were to dare to invade, they would show no mercy.

"As soon as we invade, the Swallow Mountain branch will immediately retaliate. The leader of the Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain, Daoist Xu Ke, has said long ago that if our Ji clan were to dare to attack, then they would dare to kill us." Truekeep continued, "Although during the past nine years, our Ji clan's power in terms of our Xiantian experts has swelled, it truly wouldn't be worth it for us to truly fight head on against Snowdragon Mountain. Their foundation is much deeper than ours, and in terms of supreme experts, behind them are Primal Daoists."

"Let's not rush to fight them." Ninefire shook his head. "I'll go ask Ji Ning about this."

The local branch of Snowdragon Mountain was a tough bone to chew on. They were the final obstacle preventing the Ji clan from completely

dominating Swallow Mountain.

Chapter 31: Ji Ning's Letter

However, this was the new year celebration; Ninefire and the others didn't immediately go disturb Ning. They waited until the sixteenth day of the month before heading towards Serpentwing Lake.

Serpentwing Lake. Brightheart Island. Within a study.

Ning was standing in front of a desk, holding a writing brush and writing some characters. Autumn Leaf, by his side, was helping him grind the ink. Brush-calligraphy was something Ning had taken a liking to in recent years, and it was also one of the ways in which Ning trained his heart and also trained his sword.

With every single stroke of the brush, sword-light seemed to flash out in a dominating manner. Ji Ning's signature...it verily emanated an almighty sword-intent.

"The sword-intent in young master's signature has become increasingly powerful." Autumn Leaf secretly sighed in amazement, "The young master personally instructed me in all of my sword training, and I am at the peak of the Xiantian level...but when I look at these words, I feel my heart tremble, as though I'm completely powerless. In recent years, his sword-intent has grown increasingly astonishing."

Nobody knew exactly how powerful Ning had grown during these past nine years, but when Ning had occasionally taken on missions for the Raindragon Guard and revealed his power a few times, he had completely stunned all onlookers. His most successful battle was definitely his execution of Adept Poisondove.

It must be understood that evil cultivators whose bodies were surrounded by sin were usually far stronger in battle than similarly ranked cultivators. In turn, Daoist Poisondove was one of the most superb cultivators amongst the ranks of evil cultivators. He was capable of successfully escaping from the attacks of Primal Daoists...but he wasn't able to escape from Ji Ning! From this, the outside world was able to guess...that Ning's power must have truly reached a formidable level.

However, only Autumn Leaf, who had the most direct access to Ning, was able to gain a fairly accurate level of insight.

"The sword-intent in the young master's calligraphy has only grown stronger and stronger, at an astonishing rate. Compared to three years ago...it seems to have changed in a qualitative way. There's no point to even comparing him to where he was nine years ago." Autumn Leaf secretly shook her head.

"I'm done." Ning put down his brush, then said with a laugh, "Autumn Leaf, go ahead and incinerate this."

"Yes, young master," Autumn Leaf replied obediently. From the very beginning, Ning had always instructed her to burn his writings. At first, Autumn Leaf had been rather reluctant, and she had even said, "Young master, this is such fine calligraphy...I can even feel the sword-intent surging within the characters. If you were to leave this set of calligraphy within the clan to allow the juniors to view it, it would be wonderful."

But Ning had explained, "I'll be writing every day. After a few years, how many scrolls will I have written on? In addition, these examples of calligraphy are just casual writing samples; they have no keepsake value. Every year, I'll leave behind one special set of calligraphy, to be stored within the clan. As for the others, burn them all."

After Ning gave these instructions, Autumn Leaf no longer argued with him.

"Young master, young master." A voice suddenly rang out from outside. Ning raised his head to look.

Autumn Leaf also walked out, then asked, "What is it?" The messenger maidservant called out hurriedly, "The Patriarch and the others came. They are waiting in the guest hall."

"Uncle Truekeep?" Laughing, Ning instructed, "Then I'll come right now."

"Help me tidy these things." Ning glanced at Autumn Leaf, who nodded. Autumn Leaf would generally be the one to personally take care of and

store Ning's personal belongings; other maids and servants were forbidden from touching them. In particular, Ning's calligraphy with sword-intent...mere Houtian warriors might literally be frightened to death by the sword-intent emanating from them!

Even normal Xiantian lifeforms would be terrified to the point of paralysis. Autumn Leaf trained under Ning and had an exceedingly high level of expertise in swordplay, and yet...usually, even she felt her heart quiver.

.....

In the guest hall.

Ning, dressed in furs, smiled as he walked in. Upon seeing Truekeep, Ninefire, Granny Shadow, and Ah Xing in the living room, he couldn't help but say with an astonished laugh, "I thought it was just Uncle Truekeep. I didn't imagine that the Elder Patriarch and the rest of you came as well. For all four of you to come...this must be about something major."

"Is it indeed," Truekeep nodded.

"Speak, what is it?" Ning sat down.

Ninefire and Truekeep exchanged a glance, then nodded slightly. Truekeep said, "Ji Ning, you know that with your help, our Ji clan's power has grown explosively. Naturally, we've begun to expand."

Ning nodded. Any clan, upon growing powerful, would expand! He had gone to the local branch of the Raindragon Guard and traded for some techniques, which he was permitted to transfer to his clan. It must be understood that some Ki Refining techniques were possessed by virtually all large clans, and thus the Raindragon Guard would permit these techniques to be passed down to a Guard's clan. However, the price in karmic merit points would be much higher. The reason Ning had repeatedly gone to take missions was precisely due to this.

Aside from techniques, Ning had also acquired liquefied elemental essences, spirit-pills, and various other things. With those things and his

tutelage, the Ji clan's ranks of Zifu Disciples had swollen to more than ten. Three of them had left Swallow Mountain, and had joined various sects.

"The Kou clan, the Riverbank clan, and the other clans have been friends with our Ji clan for many years," Truekeep said with a sigh. "However, this matter involves the strength and success of our clan; our Ji clan doesn't need to be too merciful. That's why we asked them to voluntarily migrate out of Swallow Mountain."

Ning nodded. He knew about these matters and wasn't surprised by them. The Dongyan clan, for example, took up a mountain range of hundreds of thousands of square kilometers, comparable to more than a hundred Swallow Mountains! Snowdragon Mountain, in turn, had also taken up an extremely large territory as their headquarters! But of course, the Black-White College focused on a small group of elites, and so didn't need a large territory.

However, the Black-White College was a school; it could recruit elites from the outside world. Major tribes and clans, however, felt more trust towards their own descendants. In order for the tribe to flourish, there was naturally a need for increasingly large amounts of space.

"Currently, in the Swallow Mountain region, only that branch of Snowdragon Mountain has refused to leave," Truekeep said. "The other powers have all left. As for Snowdragon Mountain, they have the main sect behind him; clearly, they are prepared to do battle at a moment's notice. If our Ji clan dares to invade, then they will dare to attack. Our Ji clan has accumulated quite a bit of power in recent years, but reinforcements arrive from the main Snowdragon Mountain sect in an unending stream. If we truly were to fight them...the Ji clan would find it quite difficult."

Ning understood. Frowning, he said, "This local branch...are they truly so impudent as to not know when their time is up?"

"They've correctly calculated that our Ji clan doesn't dare fight with them head on, I imagine. They even sent me an envoy, saying that they

won't expand their territory, but that they also wouldn't leave. Their attitude was quite resolute." Truekeep gritted his teeth. "Hmph. Come to think of it, when our Ji clan was weak, Dong Ziqi led the Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain to try and force our Ji clan to leave, threatening us with annihilation. Now, however, they see that you, Ji Ning, are not an easy person to deal with...and so they say they won't expand? It isn't that they won't expand, it is that they don't have the strength to!"

For someone who was weak to say they wouldn't expand their territory was nothing more than empty self-praise. When the Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain had been powerful, hadn't they been constantly, slowly expanding their territory? They had been an outside force that had shoved their way into Swallow Mountain, becoming the most powerful local organization.

"Ji Ning, what do you think our Ji clan should do in response?" Truekeep looked towards Ning. "Our decision today will impact the entire clan. We can't be the slightest bit negligent."

"The Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain truly doesn't know its limits. A puny little branch...dares to act like this?" Ji Ning frowned, then said, "I'll send a letter. Uncle Truekeep, send someone to deliver it to the Snowdragon Mountain branch. However, after the letter is rolled up, it absolutely must not be opened. I'll set a restrictive spell over it."

"Alright." Truekeep nodded. Ning immediately took out leather parchment and began to write a letter.

Ninefire, Granny Shadow, Truekeep, and the old servant Ah Xing watched from the side. When they saw what Ning wrote, their faces couldn't help but change.

"Is...is this perhaps, going a bit far?" Ninefire said, worried.

"Don't worry," Ning said calmly. "Snowdragon Mountain does not concern me."

Nine years. Ning knew exactly how powerful he had grown in these nine

years. In just three years after joining the Black-White College, he had mastered the first two stances of the [Three-Foot Sword]. Nine more years had passed, and in the underwater estate...Ning had successfully challenged and overcome the fourth level of the Wargod Hall, acquiring yet another magic treasure. Ning's power, compared to nine years ago, was unfathomably greater.

"Charge into Snowdragon Mountain? That's their headquarters; I can't imagine how many secrets and spells they have hidden in that place. Even Immortals would be wary of charging in; my power isn't enough for now. But outside Snowdragon Mountain...without the support of the spells and formations located in the mountain, those Primal Daoists of Snowdragon Mountain are not enough to cause me concern," Ning mused to himself.

Snowdragon Mountain had powerful backers, yes; its backer was the Northmont clan of Stillwater Commandery! Generally speaking, all of the major powers within Stillwater Commandery would ally themselves with the Northmont clan of Stillwater, or with the Raindragon Guard!

But Ning, in turn, had backers of his own! In fact, his relationship with the Northmont clan of Stillwater Commandery was even closer than Snowdragon Mountain's...and he also had his master, Immortal Diancai!

.....

That very night. Snowdragon City of Swallow Mountain. This was the only commandery city which the local branch now controlled. As for the other two...the Ji clan had acquired both official writs when Dong Ziqi and the others had died. Now that the Ji clan was so strong, they were easily able to take over those two cities.

Snowdragon City, however, was like a nail, sticking up in the wilderness, firmly fixed into the Swallow Mountain region.

"A messenger from the Ji clan?"

"Hmph, this puny Ji clan...they only relied on that Ji Ning in order to grow strong. How old is Ji Ning? Although his potential is astonishing, it's quite possible that he might die on his Immortal path one day. I don't even know how many so-called 'geniuses' died in such a manner," a silver-

haired elder said, an ugly look on his face.

His name was ‘Xu Fang’; he was the custodian of Snowdragon City. The Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain, in turn, was under the control of Xu Ke. The ‘Xu’ clan was a fairly powerful clan which belonged to Snowdragon Mountain; it had quite a few Wanxiang Adepts. However, Adept Xu Li had died in that battle. This had enraged the Xu clan, and when Snowdragon Mountain’s main sect had begun to make preparations for sending reinforcements to Snowdragon Mountain, the Xu clan had volunteered its services bravely.

However, Ji Ning’s rate of improvement had been simply too shocking. The true leader of the Xu clan, Adept Xu Ke, had been so terrified that he had fled back to the main sect, leaving behind the Zifu Disciple, ‘Xu Fang’, to control matters here.

After all, for Ji Ning, killing a Wanxiang Adept was as easy as killing a chicken. Naturally, Adept Xu Ke didn’t dare take the risk of being present. Xu Fang would only send a message to the main sect and Adept Xu for major matters.

“Xu Fang, this is the letter my young master has written to you.” A tall, muscular old man spoke out in a cold voice.

They were in the main hall. Xu Fang was seated on his throne, while next to him was three Zifu Disciples.

“Your young master?” Xu Fang couldn’t be bothered to rebuke this man for his lack of courtesy; he was badly frightened by the two words, ‘young master’. The ‘young master’ who was writing to him...was the legendary Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake!

The three Zifu Disciples within the hall were all petrified as well. They could be disdainful in front of Ji Truekeep and the others, but as for the legendary Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake...they felt terror from the bottom of their hearts.

“Catch.” The elder of the Ji clan tossed the scroll over towards them. Xu Fang caught it, and the three Zifu Disciples next to him moved towards him as well.

He unfurled the scroll. As he did, the first thing they noticed was the sword-intent which flooded towards them from the characters atop it. It caused their hearts to tremble and their legs to turn weak.

"Xu clan, of the Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain. I give you ten days to get the f*ck out of Swallow Mountain. If after ten days you have yet to move, then don't blame me for showing no mercy with my sword." It was quite a casual letter, but it was filled with an absolutely dominating aura! Normally, the Ji clan and the Snowdragon Mountain branch would tussle back and forth, but they would never get into a real fight. Ji Ning's letter, however, showed no sign of compromise at all.

They had to leave in ten days. Otherwise...he would attack!

"This...this..." Xu Fang stared, then said with fury, "This shows no respect for our Snowdragon Mountain at all. Quick, report this to the main sect! Report this to the main sect!!!"

As soon as his words came out...

Whoosh. The restrictive spells on the parchment, summoning natural fire, instantly caused the parchment to begin to blaze, transforming it into gray ash.

Chapter 32: Daoist Snowplume

"They aren't even leaving the words behind?" Xu Fang, of the Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain, and the other three Zifu Disciples were so furious that they gritted their teeth. When they looked at the characters on the leather parchment, they had sensed the sword-intent surge towards them, and had been so frightened that their legs had turned soft. They understood that they were at too low of a level, and that they were unable to comprehend the level of insight the sword-intent within the characters indicated.

However, if the high-level members of Snowdragon Mountain were to see the parchment, they should be capable of deducing Ji Ning's level of strength. Clearly, Ji Ning was extremely cautious and didn't plan on giving them that chance.

"The young master's letter has been delivered. I won't tarry!" The envoy of the Ji clan turned, openly and unabashedly walking away. As for Xu Fang and the other members of Snowdragon Moutain, they could only watch as the envoy walked away.

"What should we do?"

"Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake has made his threat. What should we do?"

They looked at each other, their gazes filled with fear and unease. Upon seeing the characters on the scroll, they immediately knew...that Ji Ning's power had reached a level that was vastly beyond their's. He was most likely capable of annihilating them with one blow. This massive gap in power which they faced made them feel tremendous pressure.

"No matter what...this person isn't someone the likes of us can deal with. Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake...he is someone who is able to effortlessly kill Wanxiang Adepts. We have to report this to the main sect."

"Right. We must report this to the main sect."

"Third Brother, we are simply too far from the main Snowdragon

Mountain sect. In ten short days...we won't even be able to make it back to the sect. There's no way to report this at all."

Xu Fang and the other three exchanged glances, their eyes filled with helplessness and bitterness. Right. Ji Ning had only given them ten days, but they were only Zifu Disciples; they wouldn't be able to make it back to Snowdragon Mountain in just ten days. They wouldn't be able to alert the main sect of the letter and the threat which Ji Ning had made.

"There's no other options. I'll have to use the talisman," Xu Fang said, shaking his head. "Although there's no way to let the main sect know of the details, at least we'll be able to let them know that something happened."

"Right. Break the talisman."

"That's our only choice."

All four men were in accord.

The leader of the Swallow Mountain branch was Adept Xu Ke, but because Adept Xu Ke was terrified of Ji Ning, he had hidden himself within the main sect. Before leaving, he had left three talismans, then gave these instructions: "These three talismans are different in size. When you break them, I'll be able to sense it. If you break the smallest talisman...that means that the Ji clan's attack is imminent! If you break the middle one, that means Ji Ning's attack is imminent! And if you break the largest one, that means that the local branch has already been shattered. Remember – only when a true emergency occurs are you to break these talismans."

These three talismans represented three different danger levels.

An attack from the Ji clan?

This meant that the situation wasn't that bad; after all, in terms of their relative power bases, the local branch of Snowdragon Mountain truly wasn't afraid of the Ji clan. But if Ji Ning were to attack...then things really would turn grim. There was no way the Swallow Mountain branch could possibly resist the monster-like 'Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake'.

Xu Fang waved his hand, and three talismans of different sizes appeared within it.

"Ji Ning is going to personally attack...there is nothing we can do."

"We have to hope that the main sect will send experts to come negotiate with Ji Ning."

In their hearts, they didn't believe that the main sect would truly choose to engage in a battle with Ji Ning. After all, he was a disciple of the Black-White College, and he had an Immortal behind him! Compared with the Black-White College, Snowdragon Mountain was unfathomably weaker. Although it was on good terms with the Northmont clan of Stillwater Commandery, the Black-White College was actually located inside Stillwater City, and its relationship with the Northmont clan was incomparably close.

It could be said that the Northmont clan viewed the Black-White College as its hands and arms, while Snowdragon Mountain was nothing more than a lackey.

"Crack." Xu Fang shattered the second, pitch-black talisman.

The distant Snowdragon Mountain. This was a place of unending winter, of eternal snow. Peaks of various heights towered here, with Immortal cultivators living with them. Within one such peak, the master was Adept Xu Zhen.

Adept Xu Zhen had pale, beardless face. He appeared quite handsome. He sat in the lotus position on his jade bed. The white-robed Adept Xu Zhen's eyes were closed in relaxation, and he appeared quite rested. Next to him, there were two young apprentices waiting on his instructions and his needs.

"Eh?" Adept Xu Zhen's face suddenly changed slightly. With a wave of his hand, he produced a black talisman. This talisman had already shattered.

This talisman had originally come in a pair. If one was shattered, the other would crumble as well.

"This talisman is..." Adept Xu Zhen thought back to what he had said, and then his face changed. "This is the second talisman. It represents that Ji Ning is going to act against the Swallow Mountain branch!"

"Ji Ning...he has quietly slumbered for nine years. Is he finally going to attack?" Adept Xu Zhen was rather panicked.

When the Xu clan had volunteered to be stationed within the Swallow Mountain region, they had done so for two reasons. First, they had been angered by the fact that Adept Xu Li had died there. Secondly, they wanted to expand the territory of their own clan. But how could they have imagined that soon after they had taken over, news would come...that Ji Ning had joined the Black-White College?! This caused the Xu clan to be filled with boundless regret. This assignment had become a hot potato that they couldn't discard, because...the prestige of Snowdragon Mountain meant that the Xu clan was absolutely not permitted to retreat or fold up.

But as time passed, Ji Ning's fame only grew greater and greater! Adept Xu Ke had been so terrified that he had hidden himself back within the main sect, leaving behind only those four Zifu Disciples. Even if the four of them died, it wouldn't represent too much of a loss for the Xu clan.

"Ji Ning has finally revealed himself. What should we do next? My Xu clan has multiple Wanxiang Adepts, but I'm afraid that even if we join forces, we won't be able to overcome Ji Ning. He's a monster that was capable of killing even Adept Poisondove!" Adept Xu Ke frantically pondered what to do next. "I have no other options...I'll have to go visit Master."

Snowdragon Mountain had a total of three Primal Daoists; they were Daoist Snowplume, Daoist Coldsun, and Daoist Blackdragon. They each took up one of the three highest mountain peaks in the region. The master of Adept Xu Ke, in turn, was Daoist Snowplume.

For a school of elites like the Black-White College, the Primal Daoists of the second generation disciples, when interacting with the Wanxiang Adepts and Zifu Disciples of the third generation disciples, would be fairly courteous. They wouldn't act arrogantly or show off! However, in

schools with many disciples, where dragons swam alongside minnows, the more powerful one was, the more high-and-mighty one would behave. In the case of Snowdragon Mountain, to be one of only three Primal Daoists meant that one really would put on a show of grandeur.

“Senior apprentice-brother Xu Ke requests an audience.”

“Senior apprentice-brother Xu Ke requests an audience.”

First, the junior disciples guarding the gates to the mountain would make the announcement. Next, one of the 99 male Zifu Disciples or 99 female Zifu Disciples would go to report this to one of the Wanxiang Adepts servants, who would then personally inform Daoist Snowplume.

“Master, junior apprentice-brother Xu Ke requests an audience,” a gray-robed man said, standing respectfully outside a private room.

“Granted.” A calm voice came out from the private room.

This response was once more passed out in multiple layers, and in the end, Adept Xu Ke was finally allowed to come to the private room. Generally speaking, Daoist Snowplume would only permit disciples which the school valued greatly to remain by his side. For the likes of Adept Xu Ke, who had no chance at all of breaking through to become Primal Daoists, they had all been sent out long ago. They would only be permitted to make an occasional visit if they had something important to discuss.

“Your disciple greets you, Master.” Adept Xu Ke respectfully knelt outside the private room. The outside area was covered in piles of snow. The white-robed Adept Xu Ke, kneeling there within the pristine white snow, actually made for quite a beautiful sight.

Creaaak.

The door swung open.

A handsome Daoist, dressed in a feathered robe, walked out. He had a head full of long, unbound black hair, and a hint of amusement could be seen in his long, slender eyes.

He was one of the three titans of Snowdragon Mountain; Daoist Snowplume!

Daoist Snowplume's disciples all shared one commonality; they had to be handsome. He himself was an extremely handsome man, and the same was true for his disciples. The kneeling Xu Ke, the gray-robed man by the door...all of them were exceptionally attractive in their looks.

"What is it?" Daoist Snowplume said calmly.

"Respected master," Adept Xu Ke said, still kneeling, "Years ago, our Swallow Mountain branch, because of the Ji clan, was nearly annihilated. At that time, I went along with some of my fellow disciples and took up station there, helping to steady and firm up that branch. However, by now, Ji Ning's level of power has reached unearthly levels. Relying on his prestige, the Ji clan has shown us no consideration at all. This very day, I received word that Ji Ning is about to attack our Swallow Mountain branch in person! I truly am unable to do anything about him, so I have come to request an audience with you, Master. I beseech you, Master, tell me what I should do with regards to this Ji Ning."

"Ji Ning?" Daoist Snowplume frowned slightly. "He is going to personally attack? How did you receive this news? We are quite far from Swallow Mountain; I imagine that by now, our branch has already been destroyed."

"It shouldn't be," Adept Xu Ke said respectfully. "When I left Swallow Mountain, I left behind three talismans to my clansmen. The destruction of different talismans represented different types of news! The talisman they destroyed...represented that Ji Ning would be attacking personally! As soon as they destroyed it, I became aware of this news, and so I immediately came to visit you, Master."

Daoist Snowplume nodded. "I have heard of the affairs between Ji Ning and the Swallow Mountain branch. Ji Ning is perhaps too arrogant; our Snowdragon Mountain has always been accommodating and unwilling to create true enmity between our two sides, and we even chose to pretend as though the death of Adept XuLi didn't happen. After all, in truth, that

year, it was our Snowdragon Mountain which suffered a loss, not their Ji clan.”

“But he views this as being insufficient; he even wants to expel our entire Swallow Mountain branch?” A hint of anger had appeared in Daoist Snowplume’s eyes.

How could anyone capable of becoming a Primal Daoist be a pushover?

“Hmph! No matter what, he is merely a Wanxiang Adept; he’s not yet qualified to try and force Snowdragon Mountain into avoiding him!” Daoist Snowplume said coldly, “Let’s go. Accompany me to Swallow Mountain.”

Adept Xu Ke and the gray-robed man were both greatly shocked. The master was going to go in person? They had originally assumed that an envoy would be sent to negotiate.

“He is a mere Wanxiang Adept,” Adept Snowplume said coldly. Snowplume was a cultivator who had trained for more than a thousand years, and was now at the peak of the Primal stage! Although some truly monstrous Wanxiang Adepts were capable of giving Primal Daoists a good fight, there were differences between early, middle, late, and peak-stage Primal Daoists.

How could he possibly fear Ji Ning?

“The Black-White College has a large number of Wanxiang Adepts; the most monstrous of them are the truly genius disciples such as Holyfire. Every few centuries, they will produce another ‘genius’, but in the end, the Black-White College still only has a few Immortals.” Daoist Snowplume mused to himself that becoming an Immortal was no easy feat! “Even if Ji Ning is a monster, it will still be hard for him to become an Immortal! And even if he does become an Immortal...he will still be under the control of the Marquis of Stillwater. What can he do to us!”

“Come, let’s go take a look at this Ji Ning and see how much of a ‘genius’ he is and how much of a ‘monster’ he is, for him to show such disregard for our Snowdragon Mountain,” Daoist Snowplume said calmly.

“Yes.” Adept Xu Ke and the other all immediately bowed in acknowledgment.

Shortly afterwards, a large warship, under their control, began to soar through the skies, departing from Snowdragon Mountain.

Chapter 33: A Primal Daoist and Ji Ning

Within the Swallow Mountain region.

The ancient Immortal vessel, emanating a powerful, crushing aura, was surging towards Serpentwing Lake.

“Our respects to you, Patriarch.”

Xu Fang and the other Zifu Disciples knelt down, extremely nervous. They didn’t even dare to raise their heads to look at him. To the four Zifu Disciples...the Primal Daoist level was unfathomably distant from them. In addition, they hadn’t imagined that after shattering that talisman, one of the three Patriarchs of Snowdragon Mountain, Daoist Snowplume, would be the one to come.

“Describe the situation to me in detail.” The feather-robed Daoist Snowplume sat there. He gave them a sideways glance, then closed his eyes and calmly gave them their orders.

“Yes.” The leader, Xu Fang, cleared his throat, then said nervously, “Just yesterday, an envoy from the Ji clan came to our Snowdragon City and tossed a scroll written by Ji Ning for us to read. When we saw the scroll... we were immediately frightened by the terrifying sword-intent contained within those characters, to the point of our legs going soft and our hearts quivering.”

“You were so frightened that your hearts quivered and legs went soft?” Daoist Snowplume suddenly opened his eyes wide as he stared at the kneeling Xu Fang.

“Right. Patriarch, you can ask the other three,” Xu Fang said hurriedly. The other three kneeling Zifu Disciples all hurriedly nodded as well. “It is true. We were so frightened that our hearts shook and our legs went weak. The characters on that scroll did truly contain a terrifying sword-intent. We’ve never seen such a terrifying sword-intent before...those characters completely chilled our hearts.”

“We wouldn’t dare to live. This sort of sword-intent...we’ve never even

heard of it before.”

“This was the letter written personally by Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake.”

All of them hurriedly responded in unison. This caused Daoist Snowplume to frown and bark, “Give me that letter and let me look at it.”

Xu Fang immediately said, “That scroll was covered by a restrictive spell. When we opened it and read it, it automatically self-destructed and was set aflame.”

Daoist Snowplume’s face instantly turned rather unsightly. This caused Xu Fang and the other three to be utterly terrified at the thought that they might have angered their Patriarch.

“What did his letter say?” Daoist Snowplume barked.

“His letter just had a simple line of words. It said this: Xu clan, of the Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain. I give you ten days to get the f*ck out of Swallow Mountain. If after ten days you have yet to move, then don’t blame me for showing no mercy with my sword.”

Xu Fang was a cultivator; naturally, his memory was extremely good, and he had completely memorized the words which Ji Ning had written.

Daoist Snowplume, upon hearing this, immediately started to laugh. “He’s quite arrogant. He truly does hold our Snowdragon Mountain with no regard at all.”

“The rest of you can leave.” Daoist Snowplume waved his arm. Instantly, Xu Fang and the other three quickly departed from the cabin, leaving behind only Daoist Snowplume and his two disciples.

“Master.” Adept Xu Ke and the gray-robed man both looked towards their master, waiting for his response.

“For the sword-intent within that scroll to terrify Zifu Disciples to the point of their legs going soft...no one within Snowdragon Mountain has been able to produce sword-intent on this level,” Daoist Snowplume said, nodding gently. “I’ve heard that this Ji Ning specializes in using the sword. Now, it seems, this truly is the case. However, no matter how

talented he is, he is merely a Wanxiang Adept, and the only magic treasures he can use are top-grade Earth-ranked magic treasures.”

Daoist Snowplume felt absolute confidence. Most of the so-called ‘Primal Daoists’ who were defeated by Wanxiang Adepts were mere early-stage or middle-stage Primal Daoists. He, however, was a peak-stage Primal Daoist!

He had trained for more than a thousand years. As one of the three Patriarchs of his clan, all the magic treasures he used were high quality Heaven-ranked magic treasures. Everything else aside, his foundation of elemental energy and his magic treasures completely surpassed Ji Ning’s. That was without accounting for the ‘primal fire’ his body could produce, or the ‘skywater’ he was cultivating, which was even more formidable than dire-ice...

“Let’s go take a look at this so-called genius of the Dao of the Sword,” Daoist Snowplume said with a calm laugh. “I truly am curious...what makes him think he can abuse our Snowdragon Mountain so? Does he truly think that his reputation as a disciple of the Black-White College is enough to allow him to act in such a lawless manner?”

Brightheart Island. Serpentwing Lake. Within a study.

Ji Ning was currently doing what he did almost every day...writing calligraphy! Next to his side, Autumn Leaf continued to grind ink for him. Ning, brush in hand, wrote one character after another. To him, writing was a form of enjoyment, a way to temper his heart and improve his understanding of the Dao of the Sword.

Rumble...

A surging, crushing wave of divine will instantly swept across nearly the entirety of Serpentwing Lake, including the entire Brightheart Island.

Boom. Ning’s own divine will, however, was like an unmoving boulder, and when the crushing wave of divine will struck against it, the wave.

“Which fellow Daoist is this?” Ning instantly sent through divine will. “Divine sense? It seems the outside world has underestimated you, Ji

Ning. At such a young age, you already possess divine sense...I imagine you are a reincarnated Immortal." The other surge of divine sense, having realized that it held no advantage at all in terms of the soul, began to chat with Ning. As for Ning, his own divine sense swept out as well.

[Soulshaker Art]!

A raging wave of divine will smashed outwards, crashing towards the soul of Daoist Snowplume, who was in the air above Serpentwing Lake!

BOOM.

Although Daoist Snowplume had trained for more than a thousand years, ten years ago, Ning had already reached the Primal Daoist level in terms of the soul. During the past ten-plus years, he had never slackened off vigilantly training with the [Nuwa Painting]. His soul-improvement had been tremendous, and his divine sense was now capable of stretching to nearly a thousand kilometers. This made it so that even the vast majority of Primal Daoists were unable to compete with him.

Daoist Snowplume, at least, was somewhat weaker in terms of the soul. His divine sense was only capable of stretching to six hundred kilometers!

"Autumn Leaf, tidy things up here. I'll go and take a look," Ning said. Autumn Leaf nodded and replied, "Yes, young master."

There was an ancient, enormous Immortal warship hanging in the air above Serpentwing Lake. The Immortal cultivators aboard this ship included a feather-robed Primal Daoist; it was Daoist Snowplume. At this moment, Daoist Snowplume's face changed slightly; clearly, he was feeling some discomfort from Ning's [Soulshaker Art] attack. However, since the difference in soul strength between the two wasn't that great, the collision wasn't able to affect him much.

"What a formidable Ji Ning!" Daoist Snowplume, having suffered a slight loss in secret, murmured softly to himself, "No wonder he is such a monster...so he truly is a reincarnated Immortal! But so what if he is? It'll be even harder to withstand the Three Calamities and Nine Tribulations," Daoist Snowplume smirked.

Every three centuries, a tribulation would descend. Generally speaking, a mental trial would accompany the tribulation, and the more one knew, the more terrifying the mental trial would be. Reincarnated Immortals would have mental trials that were far more powerful than the trials ordinary cultivators would face. Thus, Immortals who chose to reincarnated would initially advance at a breakneck pace, but the further they went, the harder they would find it.

In turn, there were few to no reincarnated Immortals who would successfully pass the Heavenly Tribulation to become Celestial Immortals. Their chance was actually far lower than the chance which most Immortal cultivators faced.

"A reincarnated Immortal?" Adept Xu Zhen and the gray-robed man looked at each other, secretly shocked.

"This Ji clan truly did blunder into tremendous luck; a reincarnated Immortal was actually born into their clan," Adept Xu Ke mused to himself. "That junior apprentice-brother of mine, Xu Li...poor bastard...he died to a reincarnated Immortal..."

Daoist Snowplume said calmly, "Don't be frightened by that. So what if he is a reincarnated Immortal? Many reincarnated Immortals fall and perish on their Immortal path, even before becoming Immortals again. This is all too common."

This was the truth.

The likes of the Sloppy Daoist and Holyfire all had foundations for becoming Immortals! However, the path of Immortal cultivation was a path which went against the will of the heavens...and so the heavens would send invisible trials and tribulations, causing the vast majority of these geniuses to fall and perish. It was equally possible for reincarnated Immortals to perish at the Wanxiang Adept or Primal Daoist levels.

"Are you Daoist Snowplume of Snowdragon Mountain? A distant voice rang out, a voice which shook the world. Daoist Snowplume walked straight to the helm of the ship, staring into the distance.

Off in the distance, there was a fur-clad youth. He looked like an

ordinary youth from a barbarian tribe, and behind him, there was an azure-robed maiden and a large, snowy white dog. They all stood there in midair, staring towards the ship.

"Master, these people from Snowdragon Mountain come with bad intentions," the nearby Little Qing sent mentally.

"Of course they do. However, I didn't expect that my intentions to drive out their Swallow Mountain branch caused a Primal Daoist to come in person." Ning stared towards the distant warship.

Daoist Snowplume, standing at the helm of the Immortal warship, truly did have the elegant aura of an Immortal. He laughed loudly, "I am indeed. I heard that the Black-White College has produced a disciple, Ji Ning, whose talent is astonishing and whose power is formidable. Upon my first time meeting you...I can tell that your reputation is well-deserved."

"You praise me too much," Ning replied. "Might I ask why you have come to my Serpentwing Lake, Daoist Snowplume?"

Daoist Snowplume, aboard his warship, spoke frankly. "I have come because of some matters between you and the local branch of our Snowdragon Mountain. Your Ji clan is expanding its territory here in Snowdragon Mountain...our local branch won't hinder you in the slightest, but I heard that you sent word ordering the branch to move away within ten days?"

"That did indeed happen," Ning said, nodding.

"Don't you feel that you are being a bit too arrogant?" Daoist Snowplume looked towards Ning.

Ning shook his head. "Based on what I know, your Snowdragon Mountain, in establishing your headquarters, have taken over a territory of a hundred thousand kilometers. You have also set up numerous branches throughout Stillwater Commandery, and are constantly infiltrating into new areas and continuing to expand your branches. Can it be that your own Snowdragon Mountain is permitted to frantically expand, while my Ji clan is to be so limited that we cannot even take over

the Swallow Mountain region?"

Those who were powerful would naturally expand.

"How can your Ji clan be compared in the same breath to my Snowdragon Mountain!" Daoist Snowplume said with a frown.

"In the past, when our Ji clan was weak, your Swallow Mountain branch dared to constantly invade and push forward, becoming the most powerful force within Swallow Mountain despite not being local to this place. You even dared to try and forcibly take our elemental ore mine!"

Ning stared at Daoist Snowplume. "Now that our Ji clan is powerful, can it be that we can't even expel a single branch of yours? Can it be that only you are allowed to abuse others, while our Ji clan isn't even allowed to expand?"

A look of anger was on Daoist Snowplume's face. "You truly are determined to exile our Swallow Mountain branch?"

"Right." Ning nodded.

"You are holding Snowdragon Mountain in no regard at all!" Daoist Snowplume said with anger.

"Think whatever you wish. The expelling of the Swallow Mountain branch is something I have set my mind on doing," Ning said, staring at Daoist Snowplume.

Their gazes intersected.

Daoist Snowplume instantly understood that this Ji Ning was not going to lower his head.

"Do you think that your reputation as a disciple of the Black-White College will scare me off?" Daoist Snowplume's face sank, and his voice began to echo in the skies. "I urge you to know when to cut your losses. Otherwise...today, I will personally teach you a lesson and let you know... that the words you say need to be matched with an equal amount of strength."

Ning stared at the distant Daoist Snowplume. He cracked his lips into a

smile, and his voice also echoed in the skies. “The words you say need to be matched with an equal amount of strength...well-spoken! I was actually hoping for you to provide me with some pointers, Daoist Snowplume, and see what formidable techniques you have!”

Daoist Snowplume was instantly enraged. “You don’t know your limits,” he howled angrily, his voice echoing out like a thunderclap from an enraged God of Thunder. Instantly, the world around them began to change colors. “I shall grant you your wish.”

“Come!” Ning’s response was cold and calm.

Chapter 34: Ji Ning Battles a Primal Daoist

Daoist Snowplume soared onto a cloud, then stood there in midair, staring towards the opposite Ji Ning.

“Little Qing, Uncle White, the two of you, stay farther away,” Ning instructed. This was a competition between himself and Daoist Snowplume; there was no need for Uncle White or Little Qing to interfere.

“Ning, son, be careful,” the Whitewater Hound instructed.

“Master, beat the crap out of that old Daoist!” Little Qing clenched her fists, full of anticipation. Although she didn’t know exactly how strong Ning was, she knew he was unfathomably stronger than he had been when they had met in the wild marshes of the Gaol Mountains.

.....

Daoist Snowplume and Ji Ning both stood there in the air, staring at each other.

“They are actually going to fight?!”

Adept Xu Ke and the gray-robed man both watched with eyes filled with amazement.

“Senior apprentice-brother Lu, how can this Ji Ning be so bold as to dare to fight against Master?” Adept Xu Ke had never, even in his wildest dreams, imagined that Ji Ning would be this arrogant, not even giving Daoist Snowplume any face. “Master is a peak Primal Daoist, and has the full strength and support of our Snowdragon Mountain sect behind him; even amongst Primal Daoists, he would be considered formidable.”

“Madman. A true madman.” The gray-robed man shook his head, also in disbelief. “Can it be that this Ji Ning thinks that he can defeat Master? Master isn’t like some of those newly ascended Primal Daoists; he became a Primal Daoist centuries ago! His foundation is unfathomably deep and stable, and he has gained tremendous fame!”

The two of them, both Wanxiang Adepts, were stunned. And as for the Zifu Disciples on the ship? Their amazement went without saying!

The large group of Zifu Disciples of Snowdragon Mountain were completely shocked and dazed. Ji Ning actually dared to challenged their unfathomably exalted Patriarch, Daoist Snowplume? He was absolutely suicidal!

“I shall grant you your wish!”

“Come!”

Daoist Snowplume and Ji Ning’s words, one after the other, thundered in the skies, filling the air above the entire Brightheart Island. Quite a few denizens of the island had already stood up to stare.

“Ji Ning is going to fight a Primal Daoist?” Ji Ninefire’s face instantly changed.

“How can Ji Ning act so rashly? That’s a Primal Daoist! And a peak Primal Daoist, at that...even if he wanted to fight one, he should choose an early or mid-stage Primal Daoist to test himself against first. How can he immediately challenge a peak Primal Daoist like Daoist Snowplume?” Ji Truekeep was panicking as well.

In fact, he even began to feel regret. He began to regret asking for Ning’s advice as to how they should deal with the local branch of Snowdragon Mountain. He had no idea that Ning would be so ‘unyielding’, and be willing to go head on against the enemy, even when they sent a Primal Daoist!

“Daoist Snowplume...he’s a peak Primal Daoist!” Granny Shadow was beginning to worry as well.

The Ji clan had always been on poor terms with Snowdragon Mountain, which was why Ning had acquired a set of detailed intelligence reports on Snowdragon Mountain. After reading it, he had stored it within the Ji clan’s archives. Naturally, Truekeep, Granny Shadow, and the others had all read through it and had gained an extremely clear understanding of Snowdragon Mountain.

And this was exactly why they were so worried right now.

“Young master...” Autumn Leaf chewed on her lips, holding her breath

as she stared at the two figures in midair.

.....

Everyone on both sides felt that Ning was playing with fire...but Ning himself knew his own level of power clearly. The reason why he dared to write such a letter...was because he truly felt no fear towards Snowdragon Mountain's Primal Daoists!

There were differences in power amongst Primal Daoists as well.

The Primal Daoists of the Black-White College, for example, were absolute elites amongst elites, who were even capable of giving Immortals a fight! Some of the weaker, early-stage Primal Daoists, in turn, were far, far weaker...even nine years ago, Ning was confident in being able to escape with his life from them. It was precisely figures like Daoist Snowplume who were the most suitable for Ning to test himself against.

"Even if you are a reincarnated Immortal, I imagine that at your current level of power, you haven't completely awakened all of your former memories," Daoist Snowplume said, shaking his head and laughing. "I'll let you know...what the difference is between Primal Daoists and Wanxiang Adepts!"

A fan suddenly appeared within Daoist Snowplume's hand. He gave it a casual wave.

Whoosh!

This fanning motion instantly caused flames to appear out of nowhere. A brilliant golden flame wildly rippled forth, exploding into a sea of flames that swirled towards Ning.

"Primal Fire?" Ning instantly recognized it for what it was. Primal Fire was something which every Primal Daoist possessed. During his adventure in the wild marshes of the Gaol Mountains, the Dragonwhale, upon becoming a Primal Daoist, had relied on this technique to burn Adept Redbud to death. However, at that time, the Dragonwhale had only been an early-stage Primal, and so the power of his Primal Fire wasn't

strong enough. It was far weaker than Daoist Snowplume's Primal Fire.

"Condense." Ning let out a soft chant. Instantly, a lotus flower colored red and green suddenly appeared out of nowhere. The green came from the leaves of the lotus flower, while the red came from the petals. The enormous green leaves swirled around the red petals in the center, which were clustered much more tightly together. They swiveled together naturally, with Ning at the very center, completely protected by this lotus flower.

This was his protective technique, the Waterflame Lotus.

Rumble...

The flames formed from Primal Fire seemed to cover the heavens. They surged towards Ning, but the lotus simply continued to swivel in the middle of that sea of flame. Clearly, the flames were completely unable to penetrate past them.

"What?!" Daoist Snowplume, fan in hand, revealed a look of shock on his face. "This Ji Ning is able to easily deflect my Primal Fire, and without using a sword technique, but some sort of protective technique?"

Previously, upon learning that Ji Ning's calligraphy had terrified the Zifu Disciples so badly that their hearts had trembled and their legs had gone soft, he had guessed that Ji Ning must be at an extremely high level of expertise with the sword. He had thought that Ji Ning would execute his swordplay, using it to strike against all techniques and shatter the sea of Primal Fire. Daoist Snowplume was only intending to use this 'sea of Primal Fire' to test Ning's capabilities, but he hadn't expected that Ning would be able to block it with just a single lotus.

"A lotus flower? This Ji Ning has an exceedingly deep level of comprehension of both fire and water," Daoist Snowplume mused secretly to himself.

Indeed, his words were correct.

Ning had indeed reached an extremely high level of mastery in both the Dao of Rainwater and the Dao of the Inferno. During the past nine years,

he had been supported by the underwater estate! His rate of improvement was incomparably astonishing; his past nine years was comparable to ninety years for an ordinary genius! In these two Daos, Ning already felt in a vague way that he had reached a bottleneck. With but a single further step, he would be able to completely comprehend the Daos of Rainwater and the Inferno!

With the added help he had from Ninelotus in discussing the Dao and the secrets of the lotus, Ning had further perfected this Waterflame technique. During the past nine years, Ning's dire-ice and earthfire had both reached the fourth grade as well.

With dire-ice and earthfire assisting the Divine Solar Tattoo and Divine Lunar Tattoo on his body in activating the natural fire and water of the world, and with his comprehension of the Dao of Rainwater and the Dao of the Inferno, and with his additional prowess in the mysteries of the lotus...the current Waterflame Lotus had been formed, which was now a supremely skillful protective technique.

The petals and the leaves swiveled about each other in layers, possessing incomparable defensive power.

.....

The two had exchanged their first blows. One had unleashed a sea of Primal Fire, while the other had created a lotus within the sea.

This caused the spectators on both sides to feel incomparably nervous.

"He's fine. Ji Ning is fine."

"Ji Ning is within the lotus." The Ji clan's side let out sighs of relief.

"What technique did this Ji Ning use? The Primal Fire which Master has been cultivating for centuries isn't able to do anything to him?" Snowdragon Mountain began to grow nervous.

.....

In midair.

"It seems you truly do have a bit of talent," Daoist Snowplume barked

coldly. As his words came out, the sea of fire that had filled the skies vanished. “But I want to see how long you can hold on for.”

One drop of water after another began to appear in the skies. These ‘raindrops’, however, were the size of a fist, and there were 108 of them which hovered around Daoist Snowplume’s body.

“Skywater?” Ning revealed a look of curiosity and excitement on his face. Earthfire, upon improving to the next level, would transform into skyfire; dire-ice upon improving to the next level, would become skywater. Even amongst Primal Daoists, only a few would have access to skyfire and skywater.

“Go.” Daoist Snowplume waved his fan yet again. Instantly, the 108 fist-sized raindrops shot out like meteors, slashing through the skies and smashing towards Ji Ning.

BOOM!

When the first raindrop smashed directly against Ning’s protective lotus, it broke straight through the outermost layer of leaves, but was blocked by the red petals within.

“What tremendous power.” Ning could feel the terrifying collusive force of those raindrops. His current Waterflame Lotus was capable of completely dominating the vast majority of Wanxiang Adepts, and had even been capable of blocking Primal Fire, but it had been badly damaged by a single drop of skywater...most likely, that drop of skywater would have been enough to smash an ordinary peak Wanxiang Adept to death.

Whoosh whoosh whoosh...many raindrops of skywater came smashing downward. Ning no longer dared to allow his Waterflame Lotus to take it all head on.

“Spin.” Ning held a Darknorth Sword in each hand. Sword-light flashed, and those oncoming drops of skywater, carrying a savage aura that filled the heavens...instantly began to swirl around the sword-light Ning had generated. They had actually been captured and taken control of by Ning’s sword-light.

The sword-light was like water, guiding the drops of skywater in their movements...

“Eh?” The distant Daoist Snowplume was startled. “A seemingly simple sword attack, and yet, it contained so many mysteries...Ji Ning’s sword techniques has already surpassed those of any members of Snowdragon Mountain.”

“It seems I’ll be forced to rely on raw power to crush him.”

Daoist Snowplume didn’t dare to hesitate. With but a thought, he instantly caused the drops of skywater that were wildly spinning around the Darknorth Swords to instantly detonate. Boom, boom, boom. The temperature instantly began to fall, and even the air itself began to freeze. Frost appeared on Ning’s face, covering it with a layer of white.

“Very cold.” Even Ning’s Fiendgod-like body felt the cold. “It really is on a higher level than dire-ice; the cold of this skywater...once it is unleashed, it quite astonishing!”

A large amount of frost had condensed in the surrounding area, and a faint mist was beginning to arise. Suddenly, from within the midst, two snowy Flood Dragons appeared.

“Kill!”

The distant Daoist Snowplume had finally unleashed a killing blow, the powerful magic treasure which he used to shock the world...the Binary Diffraction Swords!

The Binary Diffraction Swords were actually two swords; one yin, and one yang. The swords would transform into a pair of Flood Dragons with astonishing power. These were rare magic items, even amongst Heaven-ranked magic items. When used separately, each would be considered high-grade Heaven-ranked magic treasures. When used together...their power would merge, reaching even more shocking levels.

“Master has executed his Binary Diffraction Swords.”

“That’s the Binary Diffraction Swords. This Ji Ning is so incredibly powerful...he’s actually forced Master to use his Binary Diffraction

Swords. Even if he loses, he has much to feel proud about." The two distant spectators, Adept Xu Ke and his senior apprentice-brother, both felt stunned. For their master to have been forced to use the Binary Diffraction Swords...it meant that the other options which their master had would not be enough against Ji Ning.

Suddenly, a loud laugh.

"So these are the Binary Diffraction Swords?" With the loud laughter, Ji Ning, who had been standing in midair unmoving the entire time, suddenly manifested a pair of black wings behind his back. At the same time, his body suddenly grew in size as he transformed into a thirty-meter tall giant. A heroic, terrifying Fiendgod's aura instantly spread out, causing all of the spectators to feel their hearts freeze.

"A divine ability!"

"The 'Heavenly Transformation' divine ability!" Adept Xu Ke and the others, including the Whitewater Hound, Little Qing, and Ninefire, were all speechless.

They all knew of the 'Heavenly Transformation' divine ability, but generally speaking, one would only transform to ten meters or so in height, while powerful users might increase to fifteen meters in height. Ning, however, had actually transformed to thirty meters. His Heavenly Transformation...had made him an enormous giant with astonishing power.

BOOM!

The thirty-meter tall Ning had wings on his back, and the Waterflame Lotus around him. With a single 'step', he transformed into a gust of wind as the swords in his hands slashed out through the air, leaving behind an eye-catching, dazzling sword-light. With an explosive sound, the Binary Diffraction Swords attack, which had sought to defeat Ning, were knocked flying back.

Chapter 35: Moving Out of Swallow Mountain

"Eh?" The distant Daoist Snowplume's face completely changed. Ning's power was even greater than he had expected...but as one of the three Patriarchs of the sect, how could he just give up so easily?

Bang! Bang!

The sword-light of the Binary Diffraction Swords, which had been knocked flying back, suddenly increased tremendously in brilliance. One sword completely transformed into a Flood Dragon whose entire body glowed with blue light, while the other transformed into a Flood Dragon whose entire body glowed with golden light. These two Flood Dragons of sword-light were each three hundred meters long, and the scales on their body were clearly visible. The eyes of the double dragons were filled with a killing intent, as though they were alive!

The two Flood Dragons of sword-light, their power having explosively increased, let out earthshaking draconic roars as they charged straight towards Ning.

Ji Ning, despite being thirty meters tall, felt pressure from this attack. The Darknorth Swords in his hands once more sliced out, as though preparing to chop apart the heavens themselves as they once more left that dazzling scar of sword-light in the skies.

BANG!

BANG!

Ning's entire body trembled. He felt as though he had been struck by two giant mountains; he couldn't help but be knocked back several steps by the collision.

"What a fellow." Ning wasn't shocked; rather, he was delighted! The black wings on his back began to tremble as he used the Windwing Evasion...and for a moment, he seemed to be a ghost as he once more charged forward.

“Yin-Yang, Divide and Transform!”

The distant Daoist Snowplume’s face was extremely solemn as well. He now viewed Ning as a true, worthy opponent.

The azure Flood Dragon and the golden Flood Dragon of sword-light, high in the air, once more let out a series of earthshaking dragon roars as they wildly enveloped Ning with their attacks. As for Ning, the Darknorth Swords in his hands, he clashed against them repeatedly...and with each collision, the surrounding air blasted apart and distorted. Even the water of Serpentwing Lake below them began to distort, with troughs of many dozens of meters and massive waves of many hundreds of meters.

Even at a distance of ten kilometers, Ninefire, Truekeep, Granny Shadow, Autumn Leaf, and the others who were on Brightheart Island all felt a savage wind sweep towards them.

“What tremendous power.”

“Ji Ning is actually this powerful.”

Ninefire and the others were all speechless and stupefied.

The distant, thirty meter tall Ji Ning was like an exalted god of the heavens, battling against those two massive Flood Dragons!

“He’s actually able to battle a peak-stage Primal Daoist to a standstill?”

“That’s one of the three Patriarchs of Snowdragon Mountain!”

“Too strong.”

“It’s only been ten-plus years since the battle at Oxborn Mountain, but Ji Ning has advanced to such a level. If Yichuan were still alive, he would definitely be incomparably delighted.” Ninefire and the others were both stunned and excited; after all, the incomparably dazzling figure before them was the ultimate expert of their Ji clan.

The Ji clan’s side was excited and animated.

Snowdragon Mountain’s side, however, was shocked and enraged.

Ning, who was battling in midair against the two Flood Dragons of

sword-light, suddenly began to move in a different way; the extremely forceful and dynamic swordplay suddenly became incomparably reserved and stately.

Bang!

Bang!

The sword-light in the air seemed to have transformed into the light of the moon; it was incomparably soft. It also seemed like the caress of a lover...silently, soundless, the two Flood Dragons of sword-light began to crumble.

"What?!" Daoist Snowplume was shocked. This sword technique, 'Yin-Yang, Divide and Transform', was an extremely powerful one. And yet, even this technique was unable to resist Ning? Holding nothing back, he immediately unleashed the most powerful technique available to him: "Binary Commingling!"

Those two Flood Dragons of sword-light, on the verge of collapse, actually began to twist into each other, connecting into each other as though they were two living creatures bound into one body.

The commingling Flood Dragons of sword-light supported each other, reinforcing each other's deficiencies and completely blocking Ning's sword technique.

"In terms of profoundness of sword techniques, he is absolutely inferior to me." Ning knew this quite well. "However, the foundations of Daoist Snowplume are simply too strong...and those two Heaven-ranked swords are also exceptionally powerful."

The Darknorth Swords were Bloodforged weapons; the more one used them to kill, the more death-energy and baleful energy they would absorb and the more powerful they would become. However, during the past nine years, Ning hadn't killed many people...and so these Darknorth Swords continued to be the equivalent of top-grade Earth-ranked magic treasures. Compared to the Binary Diffraction Swords, they were unfathomably weaker.

Ning's superiority in sword techniques had cancelled out his inferiority in weaponry.

"I have to unleash the advantages of my Fiendgod body." Ning's primary goal in this battle was to test his own ability; however, since the opponent's pair of Binary Diffraction Swords had already unleashed a power which surpassed his most powerful sword techniques, he could no longer just use sword techniques to compete.

Swish!

Swish!

Instantly, the surrounding wind began to howl as Ning himself merged into a gust of wind, moving with ghostly speed as he charged directly towards Daoist Snowplume.

Nine years. Not only had he improved tremendously in using the Heavenly Transformation technique, his Windwing Evasion technique had also improved an astonishing amount. And now, he was unleashing his full power!

Daoist Snowplume was tremendously shocked, and hurriedly controlled the Binary Diffraction Swords to try and block Ning.

Clang! Clang!

Ning's swordplay became even softer, only defending and not attacking. In the blink of an eye, he managed to charge towards Daoist Snowplume's side.

"Not good." Daoist Snowplume was shocked; how could he dare fight against Ning in close combat? If Ning was struck by a sword, by relying on his Fiendgod body, he could almost instantly heal; if he, Daoist Snowplume, was struck by a sword, he would only be heavily wounded if he was lucky. If he wasn't that lucky, he would truly perish!

Whoosh!

Daoist Snowplume immediately utilized his own evasive technique. A snowy white light flashed, and Daoist Snowplume immediately retreated

back onto his warship.

"Master." Adept Xu Ke and the gray-robed man stared, astonished, at Daoist Snowplume, who had suddenly appeared in the midst. The two distant streaks of sword-light flew over as well; it was the Binary Diffraction Swords.

Daoist Snowplume's face was incomparably unsightly to behold. He spoke out, "What a formidable Ji Ning. Sword Immortals live up to their reputation. Admirable, admirable!"

His voice was deep and it shook the heavens.

"Let's go."

After Daoist Snowplume finished his words, that gigantic warship instantly soared away, quickly disappearing into the horizons.

Ning stood there in midair, watching Daoist Snowplume and the others depart. "Daoist Snowplume is quite a decisive fellow. He hadn't even lost, but upon seeing that the current state of affairs was set in stone, he immediately retreated."

Ning had engaged in this battle, primarily to test his strength. Over the past nine years, his [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens] had already reached the eleventh stage, and he had a body that was comparable to a peak Fiendgod Body Refiner. The main issue was that after advancing through one of the major stages, training in the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens] would become considerably harder; thus, in the past, every two or three years, Ning would advance by a stage. But from the tenth stage to the eleventh stage, Ning had spent six years!

Clearly, the amount of time he had spent was much more.

Still, at least his Fiendgod body was all but perfect, superior to the likes of Bloodshadow. In addition, he also had the divine ability, [Starseizing Hand]; upon using it, his power was no less than that of a peak Primal Daoist's! And this was with his [Starseizing Hand] being only at the first cycle; if he were to train to the second cycle of the [Starseizing Hand],

then the power would be even greater.

The training method of the [Starseizing Hand] was known as the [Six Cycles of the Starseizer].

At the Zifu level, one could train in the first cycle.

At the Wanxiang level, one could train in the second cycle.

And so on and so forth.

However, training in the [Starseizing Hand] required a large amount of precious essences of the Five Elements. A large amount of external support was required. When Ning had trained in the first cycle in the underwater estate, he had used the Five Elements essence left behind by Daoist Threelives. Now, however, to train in the second cycle, Ning would have to go seek out the precious essences by himself. During the past nine years, although Ning had collected quite a few treasures, he was still far from having enough.

"A divine body and divine abilities...with these two, I'm comparable to a peak Primal Daoist Ki Refiner," Ning sighed to himself. "My swordplay has reached the fifth stance of the [Three-Foot Sword], and is at a level even higher than his! But I'm at a disadvantage in terms of weapons...my Darknorth Swords cannot compare to his Binary Diffraction Swords."

The Binary Diffraction Swords even possessed some rudimentary sentience. Those two transformed Flood Dragons held a degree of sentience in their eyes...but it only made sense. After all, these were high-grade Heaven-ranked treasures. Upon reaching the higher 'Immortal-ranked' treasures, then a treasure spirit would emerge, such as the black bull of the underwater estate, which was the spirit of the Immortal-ranked magic treasure which Immortal Juhua had left behind.

"Master."

"Ji Ning."

"Young master..."

A distant group of people, riding on a leaf-type magic treasure, were

flying towards them. Ninefire and the others were all in a state of delight and excitement.

Good heavens. That had been a peak Primal Daoist! He had actually been forced to retreat by Ji Ning. They could tell...that when fighting against Daoist Snowplume, Ning hadn't been at the slightest disadvantage.

"My Ji clan is about to truly rise to prominence, to true prominence!" Ninefire roared with laughter. "Haha, I, Ji Ninefire, even at the moment of my death, will be satisfied. How many years...how many years! My Ji clan has finally produced such a figure! Ji Ning, I trust that soon, your name will be known throughout Stillwater Commandery!"

"Your name will be known throughout Stillwater Commandery. All of the major powers will know of you and will spread your fame." Truekeep was excited as well.

The Ji clan was merely a minor power, located in Swallow Mountain. And yet, it had produced someone like Ji Ning. Someone capable of forcing a Primal Daoist like Daoist Snowplume to voluntarily retreat...this battle could be described as the battle which truly established Ji Ning's reputation. His fame would be spread throughout the region; after all, he hadn't battled a mere middle-stage Primal Daoist, or an ordinary, unaffiliated practitioner. Daoist Snowplume was a truly formidable figure!

"It wasn't bad. I didn't achieve victory, after all," Ning said. "That Daoist Snowplume is truly formidable as well; if I were to truly battle him, it's hard to say who would win."

This was the truth.

It was true that Daoist Snowplume hadn't really gone all out. Upon realizing that even his supreme technique, the 'Binary Commingling' was unable to do anything to Ning, he had immediately retreated. If this had been a true life-or-death battle, however, Daoist Snowplume wouldn't have been so stingy in his usage of the skywater in his body; he would have wildly filled the skies with it as he attacked Ning, while also

controlling flying swords to attack. Ning, in turn, wouldn't have tried to avoid injuries and would have wildly fought back.

As a Fiendgod practitioner, for Ning, injuries were a minor thing. Thus, in a true life-or-death battle, Ning would've had a higher chance of victory! But that was just hypothetical; after all, no one knew what sort of treasures Daoist Snowplume carried with him.

"Master, don't be so humble. You beat him into running away! You are a Fiendgod Body Refiner...I refuse to believe that he would dare fight with you to the death. When two combatants who are on par with each other fight, and when one is a Fiendgod Refiner while the other is a Ki Refiner, it will generally be the Ki Refiner who dies." Little Qing was incomparably excited.

Aboard the distant warship, soaring through the skies.

Daoist Snowplume could still feel his heart trembling. When a Fiendgod practitioner whose power was on par with his had charged straight towards him...that was like death sweeping directly for him. He had been so terrified, he had immediately used an evasive technique.

The nearby Adept Xu Ke and the gray-robed man didn't even dare to make a sound.

"Disciple," Daoist Snowplume said, looking at Adept Xu Ke, "Go and have your Xu clan immediately evacuate from Swallow Mountain. Ideally, avoid any and all trouble with the Ji clan in the future. Although Snowdragon Mountain doesn't fear them, they don't need to fear Snowdragon Mountain either."

"Yes," Adept Xu Ke immediately said.

"Soon, the news of this battle will be spread throughout the entire Stillwater Commandery." Daoist Snowplume shook his head. "I truly didn't expect...that I, Snowplume, would end up becoming a stepping stone for another's rise to fame."

Chapter 36: Famous Throughout Stillwater

Daoist Snowplume, as someone capable of reaching the Primal Daoist level, was no fool. He knew very well...that given Ji Ning's monstrous rate of improvement, this was someone that he absolutely could not be enemies with. Ning had only been alive for thirty short years, but he was already comparable to Daoist Snowplume, who had trained for a thousand years!

"All of you, listen clearly." Daoist Snowplume swept the crowd with his gaze. "You are absolutely not permitted to antagonize Ji Ning! If you do, even my Snowdragon Mountain will find it difficult to protect you!"

All of them assented. Nobody who had witnessed the earlier battle had the courage to go antagonize Ji Ning.

News of this battle spread with astonishing speed. Daoist Snowplume didn't issue an order of silence to his subordinates, because he knew that even if Snowdragon Mountain didn't spread the news, the Ji clan would. Given the situation, it was best for them to pretend to ignore it all and allow the news to spread.

"Given this Ji Ning's rate of improvement, I imagine that very soon, he will become even more illustrious and famous. For me to be the stepping-stone to fame for someone like him...it's not that embarrassing..." This was how Daoist Snowplume tried to console himself.

The news quickly spread to the center of the entire Stillwater Commandery; Stillwater City. Amongst Ning's friends, the first to receive word was, naturally, Northmont Baiwei.

"Hahaha, good, good, good!" Baiwei excitedly slapped his desk, causing the fruit platters and wine bottles atop it to rattle, then tumble to the floor. The nearby musicians were badly startled by this sudden act.

"Piao An." Baiwei looked at the messenger servant, who was kneeling before him. He immediately beamed and said, "You have rendered a great merit by delivering this report. I shall award you ten taels of liquefied elemental essence." He immediately tossed a jade bottle over.

The servant before him, who had just reached the Zifu Disciple level, accepted it with great excitement. This was an intelligence report that came from the spy network of Northmont Blacktiger's estate; he was nothing more than a messenger boy. And yet, just like that, he had acquired ten taels of liquefied elemental essence; clearly, young master Baiwei was exceedingly delighted.

"My brother, Ji Ning, truly is formidable. Formidable. Formidable!" Baiwei excitedly stalked back and forth within his hall. "How long has it been? Just ten years since he entered the Black-White College? He's only a peak Wanxiang Adept, and yet he's already capable of forcing Daoist Snowplume into a retreat and to relocate his local Snowdragon Mountain branch. Clearly, Daoist Snowplume has lowered his head!"

"Amongst the third generation disciples of the Black-White College, I imagine that only the likes of the Sloppy Daoist and Holyfire are capable of matching my brother Ji Ning."

"But the Sloppy Daoist and Holyfire have all trained for at least two centuries, while Ji Ning has only trained for thirty years." Baiwei was delighted for his friend...and he felt all the more convinced that he had truly hit the jackpot when he had decided to become friends with Ji Ning.

The excited Baiwei suddenly saw, out of the corner of his eye, the poleaxed, stupefied group of musicians. Only now did he remember that he was actually listening to a private concert.

"Out, out, all of you." Baiwei waved his hand. The musicians, including his maidservant, all bowed and departed.

Baiwei's eyes were filled with anticipation. "I hope that Brother Ji Ning isn't going to trip and fall on his Immortal path...given his rate of improvement, which is vastly superior to that of the Sloppy Daoist and Holyfire, and even vastly superior to most reincarnated Immortals...as long as he doesn't die, when he becomes an Immortal, he will definitely become a top-tier Immortal. By then...I'll truly have a powerful supporter by my side."

The news also quickly made its way to the Black-White College. Daoist

Flowcloud, also known as Chen Jin, had just returned from a relaxing trip to the Carefree Caverns. He was feeling quite rested and relaxed, and had just flown back into and landed within his own mountain estate.

“Senior apprentice-brother, senior apprentice-brother.”

“Senior apprentice-brother Flowcloud.”

Two of his ten retainers, both female, immediately came to greet him.

“What is it?” Chen Jin gave these two retainers a glance.

“Senior apprentice-brother Flowcloud, you wanted us to keep track of any information regarding senior apprentice-brother Darknorth, right?” One of the female retainers, the slightly skinnier one, hurriedly said, “We just heard...that senior apprentice-brother Darknorth, Ji Ning, engaged in a battle with one of the three Patriarchs of Snowdragon Mountain, Daoist Snowplume, at Serpentwing Lake. Ji Ning’s power filled the heavens, and in the end, he forced Daoist Snowplume to retreat and even voluntarily relocate the local Snowdragon Mountain branch.

“What?!” Chen Jin’s good mood instantly and completely evaporated. His face was ashen. “Did you perhaps mishear things? Ji Ning was actually able to force Daoist Snowplume into retreating? He has this level of power?”

“We didn’t mishear. This news just made its way to the Black-White College, and it has been spread throughout the College.”

“Right. Everyone is talking about it right now.”

Both of the female retainers answered together.

Chen Jin’s face was utterly pale. Ning had become the shadow over his heart long ago; for Ning to become even more dazzling naturally caused him to feel even more enraged. He barked angrily, “Describe the information you heard in detail.”

“Senior apprentice-brother Flowcloud, this event originated from a dispute between the Ji clan of Swallow Mountain and the local branch of Snowdragon Mountain...” The skinnier female retainer began to speak.

.....

"Little Sloppy, Ji Ning, by the look of things, seems to have improved quite a bit. He's already reached the same level as Holyfire and the others, and might even be comparable with you." Within a spacious, lavish hall, a short old man who was dressed in beggar's clothes was seated on the ground. In front of him were a number of bowls, filled with various types of meat and other food. He stretched out a grubby, greasy hand and snatched a chunk of meat from a bowl while using his other hand to pour wine into his mouth from a gourd.

In front of him was a fat and similarly sloppy-looking youth. He, too, was using one hand to grab at the food and eating with abandon, while using his other hand to drink from a gourd of wine.

"So what if he is comparable to me?" The fat youth didn't seem to be concerned at all, continuing to eat and drink.

"Little Sloppy, that means that your reputation as being the number one figure amongst the third generation disciples of the Black-White College might be taken away," the short elder hurriedly warned.

The fat youth shook his head. "When I first joined the Black-White College, I was completely unremarkable. Back then, there were countless senior fellow disciples who were stronger than me. But in the end, I surpassed them all...and that's when I became the 'number one figure' amongst the third generation disciples. But has that reputation ever done anything for me in terms of helping me improve in power?"

"Nope, not at all!" The fat youth seemed completely unconcerned. "In the Black-White College, I can rank at the very top, but if we look at the entire Grand Xia Dynasty and the major world they have unified...given how there are thousands on thousands of reincarnated Immortals at the Wanxiang level, I imagine that there are far more people that are more powerful than me!"

"That's why it doesn't matter at all what my ranking is within the Black-White College. I only have one opponent; myself. As long as I continue to surpass myself and improve...that'll be enough." The fat

youth shook his head. “This is also the reason why I won’t go to the imperial capital of the Grand Xia Dynasty.”

“Oh, right. This time, the imperial capital of the Grand Xia has attracted interest from the most powerful geniuses of virtually every commandery city in this boundless world. In fact, even some of the supreme talents who live in the seas beyond are heading towards the capital! This is an event that will only occur every three centuries! Only those who are below the Primal Daoist level are allowed to attend. This is a chance that only comes in three hundred years! Once you defeat the various reincarnated Immortals and geniuses of the other parts of the world, then you’ll truly soar to the heavens!” The short elder said hurriedly.

“I’m afraid of death.” The fat youth shook his head.

“You sloppy bastard!” The short elder was so angry, he began to curse. “How can you be so lazy in pursuing your Immortal path?”

“I’m in no rush. I’m going to train slowly. If there’s good wine, I’ll drink it; if there’s tasty meat, I’ll eat it. I’ll live a wonderfully happy life. Whatever level I’ll end up training to, that’ll be the level I’ll train to. I’m not going to go risk my life.” The fat youth shook his head.

The short elder was completely helpless.

Still..he felt great admiration for this fat youth. In fact, he even began to wonder...if perhaps, in terms of Dao-heart alone, this fat youth might be stronger than all of the Primal Daoists and Immortals of the entire Black-White College! Still...there was no way one could tell from the surface if another had a powerful Dao-heart or not. To this very day, he was the only one who believed that this fat youth had the strongest Dao-heart of anyone in the entire Black-White College.

.....

“Senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning truly is formidable. We haven’t seen him in ten years, but he’s grown so powerful.” Mu Northson, who had completely absorbed himself into the art of constructs during recent years, was exceptionally excited upon hearing this news. “It’s been so

many years since I've seen him...it's time for me to pay a visit."

Given how powerful Ning had shown himself to be during this battle, there truly were quite a few who wanted to go pay a visit to him now.

Northson just made some casual inquiries, and soon, a large group of people gathered.

"Let's go."

"Let's go to Serpentwing Lake."

"It's been years since we've seen junior apprentice-brother Darknorth. He has grown so powerful." More than ten people had decided to go visit Ning, most of whom were on extremely good terms with him. There were even two reincarnated Immortals amongst them.

Once one's power reached a certain level, one would naturally be acknowledged by others. Soon, this group of ten-plus fellow disciples left the Black-White College and headed towards Serpentwing Lake.

.....

The black-robed Immortal Diancai, seated on his jade bed, opened his eyes, revealing a smile within them.

"So many young fellows have gone to visit Ji Ning. It seems my apprentice's strength has been acknowledged by his fellow disciples. In fact, come to think of it...if he was able to force Daoist Snowplume to retreat, then my apprentice's [Three-Foot Sword] must have reached an extremely deep level of expertise. Is he at the fourth stance, or the fifth stance? Ugh, this kid...he didn't visit me a single time in ten years," Immortal Diancai mused to himself. Because only six stances of the [Three-Foot Sword] were made public within the Black-White College, even Immortal Diancai himself had only learned those first six stances.

But naturally, Immortal Diancai's most powerful sword technique wasn't the [Three-Foot Sword]; it was the one he had established for himself.

This battle had truly brought fame to Ji Ning. His name was spread

throughout the entire Stillwater Commandery. His friends, his seniors, his elders, and even other large clans and sects began to pay close attention to him. From this day onward, Ji Ning had become one of the notable, well-known figures of the Stillwater Commandery region.

In the distant Highwater Commandery. The Dongyan Mountains. Within a quiet, secluded cave.

A snowy white-robed Ninelotus was seated in the lotus position atop a boulder. She had been trapped within this Myriad Lotuses Cave for nearly nine years now. Almost every day, she came to try and break through the formation, but the formation set down by the Forefather of the Dongyan clan was a reflection of one's Dao-heart; to break the formation, one had to thoroughly comprehend one's own Dao-heart and to thoroughly understand one's self!

Ninelotus had never been successful.

"Mistress, mistress." A voice rang out from outside.

Ninelotus opened her eyes. "What is it?" Although she couldn't leave, her servants could still bring her news from the outside world through the most simplest of methods; by standing outside the cave and shouting towards her.

"Mistress, we just received word that the Ji clan of Swallow Mountain has forced the local branch of Snowdragon Mountain to leave. This caused one of the three Patriarchs of Snowdragon Mountain, Daoist Snowplume, to be angered and personally make a trip to Serpentwing Lake. However, that Ji Ning wasn't willing to lower his head at all, and so he and Daoist Snowplume got into a battle," the servant said.

Ninelotus was instantly furious, frantic, and concerned. "That idiot! How could he be so forceful about it? That's a peak Primal Daoist!"

"Daost Snowplume used his supreme techniques with the Binary Diffraction Swords to battle against Ji Ning, but Ji Ning used his divine ability to transform into a thirty meter tall giant. He unleashed an incomparably astonishing sword technique...and was actually able to force Daoist Snowplume to voluntarily retreat, and even lower his head

and have the Swallow Mountain branch leave," the servant said.

"What?!" Ninelotus was astonished.

Chapter 37: Leaving the Myriad Lotuses Cave

Ninelotus was truly surprised. Although she felt great admiration for Ji Ning, the young, handsome, fragile-looking Ning made her think of her own younger brothers. Ninelotus felt an almost maternally protective instinct towards Ning, and the fact that he loved to lie in his boat and drift above the waters of Serpentwing Lake further stirred the soft feelings inside her.

She knew that Ning was extremely talented, but she hadn't expected him to be this talented. His level of monstrousness had already surpassed what even she had imagined.

"The Black-White College has three reincarnated Immortals at the Wanxiang Level. Senior apprentice-sister Yu Wei has spent the least amount of time training, while the other two reincarnated Immortals have trained for more than ninety years. Ji Ning has only trained for thirty, but he's already comparable to the two of them, and perhaps even stronger." Ninelotus suddenly began to feel a bit of panic in her heart.

It was as though her Ji Ning had surpassed the limits of what she could comprehend and control.

"What's going on with me?"

"Why am I panicking? Why am I so uneasy?"

Ninelotus immediately realized that her emotions were off. "For Ji Ning to be powerful is a good thing. Why am I so nervous and restless?"

She asked herself this question, over and over. She questioned herself repeatedly.

During the past nine years of her 'imprisonment' within the Myriad Lotuses Cave, she had continuously attempted to challenge the Dao-heart illumination formation which the Forefather of the Dongyan clan had left behind. Actually, she was already quite close to 'comprehending her own heart'. Upon feeling uncontrollable nervousness and restlessness when

learning that Ji Ning had forced a peak Primal Daoist to lower his head... she finally broke through the final barrier.

"This...is me?" Ninelotus suddenly calmed down. Her eyes no longer appeared lost; the only thing left was the calmness of the vast, endless sea. "So this is who I am."

"I'm used to being in control."

"I like to control everything."

"I want to be in control of everything I am surrounded by. I am going to command the Dongyan clan and lead it to greater heights, to spread my name throughout the entire Grand Xia Dynasty." Nivelotus murmured softly to herself. Ever since she was young, she had been ambitious, but she had never truly understood her own nature as clearly as she did now. In the past, she merely acted in accordance with her subconscious.

She had gone to be a disciple of the Black-White College because she wanted to prove herself, and prove to herself, that even without the assistance of the Forefather of the Dongyan clan, she was still capable of entering the likes of the Black-White College, where only supreme geniuses were admitted.

The reason why she had never been moved by Chen Jin was because there was no way she could control the 'Chen clan' which stood behind him. And thus, she subconsciously rejected his advances.

The reason she was moved by Ji Ning...was precisely because Ji Ning's clan, the Ji clan, was very weak; thus, she was completely capable of controlling and guiding it. Ning himself was extremely talented, but his talent was still within the realm of what she, as the next leader of the Dongyan clan, was capable of controlling. So long as Ning did not become a Celestial Immortal, he would not be out of her sphere of control.

Most importantly of all...Ning's parentage and history had truly moved her inner heart. She wanted to protect him.

"He's even more powerful than I had predicted." Understanding her own nature, Nivelotus now calmed down. "However, even if he truly does

become a Celestial Immortal in the future...that'll be something that happens many, many years from now. After so many years together, the affection between the two of us will become incomparably deep and stable."

In her heart, Ninelotus didn't truly believe in 'love at first sight'.

She believed more in...love built up over time.

"The Forefather said that becoming Dao-Companions means being willing to die for each other," Ninelotus murmured to herself. "Perhaps I'm not yet able to do that for him, but in a thousand years, I believe that I will truly, whole-heartedly, be willing to die for him. He'll be willing to die for me too."

Ninelotus no longer hesitated; she immediately walked towards the grand formation. The grand formation of the Dao-heart had impeded Ninelotus for nearly nine years...but this time, it no longer did.

Ninelotus walked out of the Myriad Lotuses Cave.

"Mistress." The female servant outside, upon seeing Ninelotus walk out, immediately knelt down in surprise and delight. "Congratulations and felicitations, mistress."

Ninelotus smiled slightly.

That very day.

Ninelotus left the Highwater Commandery and the Dongyan Mountains, heading towards Swallow Mountain of Stillwater Commandery.

The sun was brilliant this day. The Forefather of the Dongyan clan, still leisurely fishing within the gorge, revealed a look of surprise on his face. He murmured softly to himself, "Ruyin, although she physically appears very similar to you, and on the surface has a temperament similar to yours...her true nature is completely opposite to yours. Ninelotus' heart is far stronger and harder than yours. She truly was born to lead. It seems that when I chose her to be the next leader of the Dongyan clan...it was a choice that will lead the Dongyan clan to great glory."

Serpentwing Lake. Brightheart Island.

Northmont Baiwei and Ji Ning were seated facing each other, toasting each other and laughing and chatting loudly and happily.

"Right! There's one thing that you never found out about," Baiwei suddenly said.

"What is it?" Ning laughed.

"The one who killed Yu Dong and Adept Mooncrescent was you, right?" Baiwei first set up a restrictive spell around them, blocking out all sound, then continued to speak softly. Ning didn't hesitate; he immediately nodded. He had originally asked Baiwei to help acquire the intelligence reports regarding Yu Dong, Shui Yi, and Dong Seven. It wasn't strange that Baiwei would be able to guess that he had done the deed.

"Adept Mooncrescent had an extraordinary background," Baiwei said softly.

"What background?" Ning was startled, although he had guessed at this long ago, which was why he had been so cautious.

"Adept Mooncrescent was a retired Immortal cultivator of one of the secret Immortal armies our Northmont clan controls, the 'Shadow Army,'" Baiwei said seriously. "You should know that after having experienced life-and-death battles with each other repeatedly, soldiers develop extremely deep ties with each other. Incredibly few manage to survive all the way into retirement. If any retirees are killed, then their old brothers will definitely stand up for them...and in fact the entire Shadow Army will support them, because they have to be able to guarantee that the retirees will have safe, comfortable lives in their final years."

Ning was shocked. So this was the situation? It really had been a secret Immortal army of the Northmont clan of Stillwater?

"Given the Northmont clan's intelligence network, they should have already found me out." Ning frowned.

"If they did, you wouldn't have been able to spend the past ten years in security and peace." Baiwei shook his head. Ning's battle with Chen Jin

had been after spending a year back at Serpentwing Lake, and then he had spent nearly nine more years...indeed, he had been back for nearly ten years.

Baiwei said softly, “The Shadow Army’s investigation traced the clues all the way to my estate, the Northmont Blacktiger estate. However, in the end, the Shadow Army is in service to our Northmont clan of Stillwater. They wouldn’t dare do anything to the Northmont Blacktiger estate, and so in the end, our estate stonewalled them. The Shadow Army was forced to just give up; they weren’t able to continue the investigation.”

Ning now understood. So it had been all thanks to the help from the estate of Northmont Blacktiger.

However, what Ning didn’t realize was that the loyalty of an army to its patron was an incredibly important thing. The Northmont clan had to take care of the feelings of their Immortal armies; thus, things couldn’t have been handled as simply as Baiwei had just implied. In truth, Baiwei himself had taken on the blame for this matter, informing the Shadow Army that it was he, Northmont Baiwei, an important young master of the Northmont clan, who had unknowingly killed one of their old retirees. There was no way the Shadow Army could act against such an important young master of the Northmont clan, and thus they had been forced to give up.

Ning, in both his past life and his present life, didn’t understand politics very well. Naturally, he wouldn’t understand that Baiwei had made sacrifices on his behalf.

“Thank you, Brother Baiwei. Please thank Uncle as well,” Ning said hurriedly.

“A minor matter, a minor matter.” Laughing, Baiwei waved his hand in dismissal, then lowered his voice again. “Brother Ji Ning, I heard some stories about you and your senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus.”

“You even know about this?!” Ning was surprised.

Baiwei nodded. “One time, when I was drinking at the Carefree Caverns, I invited Holyfire over. At that time, Chen Jin was present as well. I

mentioned you to them, thinking that since you were fellow disciples, by mentioning your name, it would help all of us be better friends. Who would've thought that Chen Jin's face would immediately turn ugly and that he would quickly leave? Afterwards, I asked Holyfire about this matter, and thus learned about the details of the situation."

Ning now understood. Shaking his head, Ning laughed, "To be honest, it's a bit funny. Ninelotus had never felt anything for Chen Jin, but Chen Jin himself, in a hotheaded fit, insisted on dealing with me...but unfortunately, I ended up dealing with him."

Baiwei shook his head. "I can tell that he feels deep hatred for you. Given how narrow-minded he is...it'll be hard for him to accomplish any great deeds. Chen Jin is of the impressive Chen clan of Highwater...who would've thought that he'd be so narrow-minded? I imagine that the Chen clan must not have provided him with very good tutelage; most likely, he hasn't been selected to be the next leader of their clan."

Major clans viewed the training and tutelage of their future leaders as something of paramount importance. They had to whole-heartedly strive to provide the proper upbringing for a suitable leader. Clearly, Chen Jin wasn't such a person.

"Senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning."

Suddenly, a voice rang out which instantly echoed across the entire Serpentwing Lake.

"Huh?!" Ning instantly rose to his feet, his face covered with delight.

"You look so happy, who is it?" Baiwei was surprised.

"That's my junior apprentice-brother, Northson," Ning said in delight.

Ji Ning and Northmont Baiwei immediately flew into the air to welcome him. A dragon-headed warship was flying towards them, with an entire group of Immortal cultivators aboard it.

"So many people?" Ning was surprised as well.

All of these people were at the Wanxiang level. Even Bloodshadow and

Yu Wei had come. In the Black-White College, they were all considered elites. In total, fifteen people had come.

“Senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning.” Northson was the first to fly over to Ning, and he excitedly pounded his fist against Ning’s chest. “Incredible! Even an old fellow at the peak Primal Daoist stage was sent scurrying away by you. In the past, when we met with that Dragonwhale King, we found it so difficult to deal with him!”

“Actually, there wasn’t a conclusive end to the fight,” Ning said hurriedly.

The white-robed, white-haired Bloodshadow spoke out. “Junior apprentice-brother, no need to be modest; you are a Fiendgod Refiner, while Daoist Snowplume is a Ki Refiner; in a situation where both sides are equally matched, Ki Refiners generally won’t dare to fight all out against Fiendgod Refiners. He retreated was because he did indeed fear you, feared dying at your hands.”

Ning, seeing this, no longer tried to equivocate.

“Junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning.” A beautiful, black-robed maiden looked at Ning.

“Senior apprentice-sister Yu Wei.” Ning hurriedly acknowledged her.

During his first Dao Debate, in the end, it had been Yu Wei who defeated Ning. During the past nine years, when Ning had gone to the Raindragon Guard branch to accept missions, he heard some news about Yu Wei; during the past nine years, she had become a brilliant star as well, and had even defeated a middle-stage Primal Daoist. Her reputation was outstanding and no less than his.

“If we were to compete again, even I might not be able to defeat you, junior apprentice-brother,” the black-robed maiden said with a laugh.

“Senior apprentice-sister, you are being too modest,” Ning said hurriedly.

“Let me make the introductions. You probably don’t recognize these people yet.” The black-robed maiden pointed to a nearby gray-robed man

with deep eyes. “This is senior apprentice-brother Vastriver. He is often adventuring in the outside world. We just so happened to run into him in the Black-White College, and so he accompanied us to come visit you, junior apprentice-brother.”

Ning was startled. Vastriver? The Black-White College only had three reincarnated Immortals at the Wanxiang level. Yu Wei was one, while Adept Vastriver was another. He had also trained for a very long period of time, and only rarely appeared for brief periods of time. This truly was the first time Ning had met him.

Chapter 38: The Tricentennial Conclave of Immortal Destiny

The gray-robed man couldn't be said to be handsome, but he truly did have an extraordinary aura. Actually, as a reincarnated Immortal, and one who had long ago mastered a complete Dao Path, he should have awakened quite a few memories of his former life. Thus, his aura would be affected, naturally making him seem different from the crowd.

"Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth," Daoist Vastriver said, smiling towards Ning, "I heard of your reputation long ago, but because I've always been adventuring, we haven't had the chance to meet. This time, upon my return, I heard that you defeated Daoist Snowplume...you truly are impressive, quite impressive. Amongst the third generation disciples of our Black-White College, only junior apprentice-sister Yu Wei is a match for you in training speed."

"I can't compare to junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning," Yu Wei said hurriedly.

"You are being modest. Junior apprentice-sister, three years ago, you completely mastered the Dao of the Freeze; compared to the two of you, myself and Vileslayer are truly ashamed," Adept Vastwave said.

"Senior apprentice-sister Yu Wei, you were able to comprehend a complete Dao Path so quickly! Only junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning is a match for you," the nearby Bloodshadow said with a laugh as well.

Ning was quite surprised. By the sound of it...quite a few people knew that Yu Wei had mastered a complete Dao Path. Vastriver and Bloodshadow, at least, knew about it.

Formidable! Yu Wei wasn't actually that old; she was only roughly ten or so years older than Ning himself! And yet, she had already completely comprehended an entire Dao Path, and the Dao of the Freeze, at that! It must be understood that when Yu Wei had defeated Ning during their initial Dao Debate, she had used techniques pertaining to fire.

“Senior apprentice-sister, aren’t you the ‘Rainbowflame Fairy’? Are you actually more talented in ice?” Ning was surprised.

“She’s skilled in both ice and fire,” Adept Vastriver sighed. “Although we are all reincarnated Immortals, there are still differences between us. Some reincarnated Immortals were ordinary Earth Immortals or Loose Immortals, while others were Loose Immortals who had trained for hundreds of thousands of years...in her past life, junior apprentice-sister Yu Wei must have been an incredible Loose Immortal.”

Yu Wei said, resigned, “We’ve come to congratulate junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning; why do you all keep talking about me? Junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, we’ve come to your place...are you going to just have us keep chatting here in midair? Aren’t you even going to offer us a glass of wine?”

“Yes, of course,” Ning immediately led the way.

The awe-inspiring group of Black-White College disciples chatted and laughed amongst themselves as they arrived at Brightheart Island. Autumn Leaf had already arranged for the servants to prepare in advance; how could they dare to be negligent in taking care of so many disciples of the Black-White College?

The entire group stayed here for time; some stayed for just two or three days, then returned on their own. Northson, Yu Wei, Vastriver, and Baiwei continued to spend some more time at the island.

On this day, the sky was completely cloudless, for as far as the eye could see.

Ning’s group was aboard a large ship on Serpentwing Lake. They were seated, drinking Immortal wine, and eating spirit-fruit.

“Junior apprentice-sister Yu Wei,” Adept Vastriver, seated opposite from her, spoke out, “There are three more years before the Conclave of Immortal Destiny. What do you plan to do during these three years?”

“Whatever I feel like.” The black-robed maiden, Yu Wei, sat there while viewing her surroundings. “I’ll stroll about and do what I please. When

enough time has passed, I'll go directly to the imperial capital of the Grand Xia."

"Then let me congratulate you in advance, Rainbowflame Fairy, for spreading your name throughout the world," Baiwei said with a laugh.

Northson stared. "Wait, wait. What are you all talking about? What Conclave of Immortal Destiny? What's this about the imperial capital? And spreading one's name throughout the world? Hey, senior apprentice-brother...do you know what they are talking about?"

Puzzled, Ning shook his head as well. "What are you all talking about? Why haven't I heard of this before?"

Baiwei said, "This Conclave of Immortal Destiny is an event which the founding emperor of the Grand Xia Dynasty established. All Immortal cultivators beneath the rank of Primal Daoist are permitted to participate. This is a tournament of the truly supreme geniuses of the world. Our Grand Xia Dynasty has unified this major world, which holds 3600 commanderies and many oceanic territories...I can't even imagine how many monstrous geniuses and reincarnated Immortals will be attending this event."

"A tournament of geniuses?" Ning was astonished.

"Right. Although it is called the 'Conclave of Immortal Destiny', it should really be called the 'Tournament of Geniuses'," Baiwei said with a sigh. "This is because one must be below the Primal Daoist level...thus, almost all the participants are peak Wanxiang Adepts. The peak Wanxiang Adepts who participate are geniuses who come from the various commandery cities and oceanic territories...I can't help but shudder, just thinking about it. Generally speaking, those who dare participate are, at the very least, comparable to Primal Daoists!"

The look on Ning's face grew solemn as well. He now understood. If all the geniuses of this entire major world were to gather in one place...it must be understood that the Black-White College of Stillwater Commandery, alone, already had the likes of the Sloppy Daoist, Holyfire, Vastriver, and Yu Wei. Stillwater Commandery had other schools and

sects and clans as well, some of whom had brought up their own heaven-defying geniuses.

Every commandery would have tens of such geniuses.

The Grand Xia Dynasty controlled 3600 commanderies, and oceanic territories as well!

In other words...the entire Grand Xia Dynasty most likely had more than a hundred thousand individuals on the level of Holyfire and Vastriver!

"If you don't have some true ability, going and participating is suicide," Baiwei said. "The reason you never learned about it is because you weren't strong enough, and so the Black-White College never notified you. After all, your defeat of Daoist Snowplume is a recent event."

Ning nodded.

"Can it be that you want to go?" Baiwei looked at Ning.

"I'm not in a rush to," Ning said.

"I, too, feel that you don't need to go. After all, you've only trained for thirty years. That's too short a period of time," Baiwei said. "You might as well just stop at the Wanxiang level and train for another three centuries and wait for the next Conclave of Immortal Destiny. If you go then...you will definitely shock the world. I know quite a few supreme talents who insisted on waiting for three centuries, and in the process mastered multiple complete Dao Paths!"

Ning was secretly speechless. Multiple Dao Paths?

"Given how high a level of comprehension they have, why not become Primal Daoists or Earth Immortals? Why insist on forcing themselves to remain at the Wanxiang level?" Ning asked.

The nearby Northson also said hurriedly, "Right. Why suppress themselves for so long? Is the Conclave of Immortal Destiny truly so enticing?"

"You don't understand," the nearby Adept Vastriver spoke out. Baiwei and Yu Wei looked towards Ning and Northson as well. Vastriver

continued, “This Conclave of Immortal Destiny ...those who rank in the top three will acquire an Immortal-ranked magic treasure.”

“Immortal-ranked?!” Northson cried out in shock.

“A single Immortal-ranked magic treasure shouldn’t be enticing enough,” Ning said with a frown. Anyone capable of comprehending multiple Dao Paths in three centuries would definitely be a truly monstrous genius; someone like this, upon becoming an Earth Immortal, shouldn’t find it too hard to acquire an Immortal-ranked magic treasure.

“That’s just the nominal prize,” the black-robed Yu Wei said.

“Participating in the Conclave of Immortal Destiny is a chance to skyrocket to the heavens in prominence. It’s a chance to allow the entire Grand Xia Dynasty to pay attention to you. If you rank in the top ten...just for the sake of becoming friends with you, some of the major clans might give you five thousand kilograms of liquefied elemental essence, or even more. That might not be too much from a single clan, but if multiple clans were to do the same...your hands would go limp from receiving liquefied elemental essence.”

“But all that is secondary.”

“The most important part of this event lies in the words, ‘Immortal Destiny’.” The black-robed maiden looked at Ning. “If you rank in the top ten of this event, then you’ll be able to apprentice yourself to some truly major powers. Generally speaking, if you do so, you’ll have a much higher chance of becoming a Celestial Immortal.”

“Major power?” Ning hurriedly asked, “Major powers of where?”

Adept Vastriver said in a low voice, “Perhaps some of the truly supreme powers of this major world who have been in seclusion...or perhaps powerful figures from outside this major world. No matter what, they will definitely be more powerful than Celestial Immortals! I’ll tell the two of you one more thing...more than 80% of Celestial Immortals we know of first came to prominence during the Conclave of Immortal Destiny, where they were accepted by major powers as disciples.”

“This is a chance, a chance to show your prowess and let the major

figures of the Three Realms to see how talented you are.” Adept Vastriver looked at Ji Ning and Northson. “Understand, now? Understand why so many geniuses are willing to stay at the Wanxiang level for three centuries? It’s all for the sake of being able to show their prowess and blaze brilliantly during the Conclave.”

Yu Wei sighed as well, “Reincarnated Immortals like us are nothing. Earth Immortals? Loose Immortals? We are nothing at all. Only becoming Celestial Immortals will one become truly carefree and unrestrained! But how hard is it to become a Celestial Immortal? The entire Black-White College, in all its history, has only produced a single one. But this Conclave of Immortal Destiny...this is a moment of true destiny. Naturally, one has to grasp it.”

Ning and Northson completely understood.

Becoming a Celestial Immortal was too hard!

If a major power of the Three Realms was willing to give some guidance, it would be much easier. For example, if Daoist Threelives were to personally teach and train Ning, his own Immortal path would naturally be much more quickly traversed.

The Conclave of Immortal Destiny...this was a chance for one to attract attention from major figures of the Three Realms.

“Beyond Celestial Immortals in power?” Northson couldn’t help but ask, “All I know is that Celestial Immortals have surpassed the restrictions of the Three Realms and are able to roam about, carefree. What is above a Celestial Immortal?”

Yu Wei and Vastriver exchanged a glance.

Yu Wei said slowly, “True Immortals! True Immortals of Pure Yang!”

“True Immortals?” Northson murmured these two words to himself.

“One of the prerequisites for becoming a Celestial Immortal is the comprehension of an entire Dao Path,” Yu Wei said. “Mastering an entire Grand Dao Path, however, is the prerequisite for becoming a True Immortal.”

Northson nodded gently. Ning did the same.

The two of them both knew what Grand Daos were. Ning's Dao of the Sword was a Grand Dao...and Northson's Dao of Constructs was also a Grand Dao! However, it was even more difficult and rare to completely master and control the Grand Dao of Constructs than it was to completely master the Grand Dao of the Sword. Some Immortals were said to be 'skilled' in constructing constructs, but to claim true, complete mastery over the Grand Dao of Constructs? Not even the legends mentioned such a figure.

"And that's just a prerequisite. To surpass the Celestial Immortal level... how incredible must that be? Any such person would be considered a formidable figure of the Three Realms. Generally speaking, those who are chosen during the Conclave of Immortal Destiny will 'only' become honorary disciples...but even being a mere gate-guard for such a major power is more exalted than being a prince of the Grand Xia Dynasty, to say nothing of an honorary disciple," Adept Vastriver said.

Ning and Northson both nodded in agreement.

Those figures could be considered major powers of the Three Realms.

Ning suddenly thought of the master of the underwater estate - Daoist Threelives. He was a Primordial Fiendgod, who had been born from the primordial chaos with the complete mastery of a Grand Dao. Afterwards, he had mastered many other Grand Daos, and then developed the [Starseizing Hand], ranked as one of the top ten divine abilities out of the innumerable divine abilities that had been created after Pangu had established the universe.

"Master said that only after I become an Empyrean God can I be considered his disciple. I wonder how strong Master is, compared to a True Immortal," Ning mused to himself.

Chapter 39: Meeting

“Senior apprentice-sister Yu Wei...” After realizing how brutal this Immortal Conclave could be, Ning couldn’t help but look towards Yu Wei. “You’ve only trained for ten more years than me, and in this Conclave of Immortal Destiny, there are monsters who have trained for more than three centuries. Isn’t it going to be very dangerous for you? If you truly are going to go, why don’t you wait for three more centuries?”

The black-robed maiden, Yu Wei, gently shook her head. “Three centuries is too long.”

“I tried to dissuade her as well,” Adept Vastriver said with a sigh.

“It’s true. It really is too dangerous. The most elite participants of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny, although still only at the peak Wanxiang level, have insight into the Dao that is definitely at the level of Immortals, and perhaps even higher than ordinary Immortals. Some are geniuses like our junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, except they have insisted on staying at this level for three centuries, for the sake of this battle.” Similarly worried, Baiwei continued, “Rainbowflame Fairy, although you are a reincarnated Immortal, you’ve spent too little time in training. Unless you’ve completely awakened your former memories...”

If that was to happen, then one would immediately gain all of the insights one had from one’s previous life. In that case, she might have a shot!

“The Conclave of Immortal Destiny...most of the people there will have mastered a complete Dao Path.” Yu Wei shook her head. “Very, very few will have mastered even two Dao Paths, and if one has mastered three, I imagine that one would be able to rank in the top ten. In comprehending the Dao, one might quickly gain insights into the Daos that one is suited for, but for the others...comprehending them will only become slower and slower.”

Ning nodded.

Aside from the Grand Dao of the Sword, Ning had aptitude for the Dao

of the Inferno, the Dao of Rainwater, and the Dao of the Gale. If he had an additional century, he had a chance of completely mastering these three Dao Paths, but if he had to go and comprehend a fourth or fifth... even if he had three hundred more years, he might not be able to do it. This is because he didn't even have the most rudimentary of insights into other Daos.

"Although I've only mastered a single Dao Path," Yu Wei said with a laugh, "I am still gaining some fragmented memories from my previous life, which have taught me some secret arts. I'm considerably stronger than those people who have just recently mastered a Dao Path."

"To try and hit the top ten? I have no chance." Yu Wei shook her head. "But, I should be able to keep myself alive."

Ning, Baiwei, and the others exchanged glances. Since Yu Wei had made her stance clear, they found it difficult to continue to try and dissuade her. In addition, reincarnated Immortals were quite special to begin with; perhaps they might suddenly gain all of their former memories.

"In my past life, I failed my tribulation; in this life, I naturally must be courageous and valiant in moving forward." Yu Wei's eyes were shining. "This Conclave of Immortal Destiny will be a chance to fight against many truly top-tier geniuses. This is a chance to test and temper myself, a chance that truly comes once in a lifetime."

Ning was suddenly swayed as well.

Right.

To be able to fight against so many geniuses...and all of whom were below the Primal Daoist level. After breaking through to the Primal Daoist level, one would no longer have a chance.

"Should I go or not?" Ning began to ponder. "Yu Wei spoke of three Dao Paths allowing one to enter the top ten. Each additional Dao Path gained represents a major increase in power...I'm still quite far away from comprehending three Dao Paths."

"I have three more years. I'll wait and see. Let's see how much more

powerful I become in these next three years," Ning mused to himself.

In this moment, Ning made up his mind that in the next three years, he would whole-heartedly devote himself to increasing his power as much as possible.

"Senior apprentice-sister Yuwei, senior apprentice-brother Vastriver." Ning looked towards his two senior fellow disciples. Yu Wei and Vastriver looked towards Ning.

"I wonder if the two of you would be willing to stay at my Serpentwing Lake for an extended period of time. As your junior apprentice-brother, I'd love the chance to ask the two of you for some pointers," Ning said. "During the past few years, only Daoist Snowplume has been a true match for me; the other few times, when I went chasing after those criminals, I've never really enjoyed a good fight."

"Hahaha!" Daoist Vastriver laughed as well. "It is indeed hard to find a good match. Junior apprentice-brother, you walk the path of the Sword Immortal; I hear that they are very skilled at battle. I want to compete with you as well, junior apprentice-brother."

Yu Wei nodded and laughed as well. "I have nowhere to go before attending the Conclave of Immortal Destiny. Before I go out and fight against the countless geniuses of the entire Grand Xia Dynasty, I might as well stay here and spar with you...perhaps this will allow my power to increase once again. However, junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, you need to prepare fine wine and delicacies; senior apprentice-brother Vastriver and I are quite picky."

"Leave that part to me," Baiwei said with a laugh. "I'll definitely make sure you three are satisfied."

These three were amongst the most elite of Wanxiang Adepts. Yu Wei and Vastriver were reincarnated Immortals, while Ji Ning was actually viewed by many as a reincarnated Immortal as well; otherwise, how could his soul be so strong? Many believed that in the past, he must have been an extremely, extremely powerful Immortal. Precisely because of how powerful he must have been in the past, it was now very hard to reawaken

his memories.

The more powerful one was in a past life, the harder it would be to reawaken one's memories. For people like Immortal Juhua or Immortal Northwalker, who were Loose Immortals but comparable to Celestial Immortals in power, if they were to reincarnate, even after becoming Earth Immortals, they still might not be able to reawaken their memories.

"Are the three of you ignoring me?!?" Northson stared. Ning, Yu Wei, and Vastriver all looked towards Northson.

Northson said angrily, "Perhaps I'm not a match for you three in controlling magic treasures, but my truly supreme, trump card constructs, were built by myself and Master together. Although it uses up an enormous amount of liquefied elemental essence, it is definitely comparable to a Primal Daoist. In addition, the construct is a magic treasure, and so its body is even more indestructible than a Fiendgod's!"

"We'll count you amongst our sparring ranks," Yu Wei said with a laugh.

"The Dao of Constructs...some powerful constructs truly are mighty," Adept Vastriver nodded. "Unfortunately, the Conclave of Immortal Destiny forbids those who train in the Dao of Constructs from participating."

"Why aren't practitioners of the Dao of Constructs permitted to attend?" Northson said angrily, "That's completely unfair!"

Ning laughed. "I know the reason. It's because I've never heard of a major power who has completely mastered the Grand Dao of Constructs. Since there are no major powers who have mastered this Dao, how can they possibly guide you into becoming a Celestial Immortal?"

Northson was speechless. Right. The point of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny was to allow some major powers to discover monstrously talented geniuses and take them as disciples. If there were no major powers who specialized in the Dao of Constructs, they naturally wouldn't choose cultivators of this Dao.

The Dao of Constructs involved the pursuit of unleashing the physical power of material items...to reach the utmost limit of the natural world! However, the world was filled with countless materials and objects; to simply review all of them would take an unfathomably long period of time. To truly master and comprehend the Grand Dao of Constructs? Not even in legends had anyone ever done this! Every single practitioner of the Dao of Constructs understood this...and at the same time, they all believed that this Grand Dao was limitless, and so they too would become even more powerful.

Yu Wei, Vastriver, and Northson settled down at Serpentwing Lake, while Baiwei returned. Ning would often compete against these three or engage in discourses on the Dao with them. This caused all of them to improve, sometimes by a little, sometimes by a lot.

One day, a large boat was floating on Serpentwing Lake. Ning and the other three were chatting on it.

"Senior apprentice-sister Yu Wei, what is it?" Ning noticed that Yu Wei's eyes were filled with unshed tears. He couldn't help but ask her what was wrong. Previously, when they were chatting, he had discussed how his parents had already passed away...and somehow, this had caused Yu Wei to appear utterly heartbroken.

Vastriver said softly, "Much like you, junior apprentice-sister Yu Wei's parents are also deceased. They died when she was young."

"They died young?" Ning was stunned.

Tears were in Yu Wei's eyes...and then they began to fall. Her gaze was long and distant. She said tonelessly, "In the past, when I was young and before I had started to train, and before I gained any of my former memories...my tribe suffered an attack. The tribesmen began to flee...and during the flight, my parents died in order to protect me. I suffered a severe shock from this, and my innately powerful soul burst forth with power, killing all of my enemies."

Ning could imagine the scene of a stimulated and shocked child, seeing her parents be killed, and then exploding forth with spiritual power.

Given how powerful the divine will of a reincarnated Immortal was...even Zifu Disciples would be easily slaughtered.

"But it was too late." Yu Wei shook her head. "My parents were gone, never to return. Although we had only known each other for three years, I'll never forget them."

Three years?

So Yu Wei had only been three years old.

.....

A long vessel was streaking through the air, moving from the distant Highwater Commandery to Stillwater Commandery's Swallow Mountain.

Because Ninelotus wasn't a member of the Raindragon Guard, she was unable to use teleportation arrays. Thus, she had to fly in a straight line.

"Finally, I'm here!" The long vessel came to a halt. A snowy-robed Ninelotus flew out. With a wave of her hand, she collected the vessel, then stared towards the distance. She immediately saw the boat on the surface of Serpentwing Lake, as well as Ji Ning, Mu Northson, Rainbowflame Fairy Yu Wei, and Adept Vastriver, all of whom were drinking and chatting.

"Senior apprentice-sister Yu Wei and senior apprentice-brother Vastriver?" Ninelotus was surprised.

Ning and the other three, on the boat below, could sense the ripples in the air. They all raised their heads to look up.

Upon seeing Ninelotus in midair, Ning revealed a look of surprise and delight. He immediately rose to his feet.

Yu Wei and the others rose up as well. Yu Wei and Ninelotus were extremely close to each other, and she immediately called out in a high voice, "Little Sister Ninelotus."

Swoosh!

Ninelotus descended from the skies, landing on the ship. First, she exchanged a glance with Ning. A hint of emotion could be seen in both

their eyes. And then, Ninelotus turned to look at Yu Wei. She said happily, "Senior apprentice-sister, I didn't expect to see you here as well. It's been so long since we've met. Oh, and senior apprentice-brother Vastriver and junior apprentice-brother Northson."

"It's been a long time since I've seen you as well. It's been ten years, right?" Yu Wei felt very happy. "Why did you disappear for ten years?"

"I don't even want to talk about it." Ninelotus shook her head helplessly. "I was held by the tribe in the Myriad Lotuses Cave and wasn't able to leave, up until a few days ago, when I managed to break through the formation around it. I flew all the way from Highwater Commandery to Stillwater Commandery. It took me forever."

"Given your status, why would the clan hold you in the Myriad Lotuses Cavern?" Yu Wei was surprised. It could be said that she was Ninelotus' closest friend in the Black-White College; although Luo Qing was someone who had grown up with Ninelotus, Yu Wei and Ninelotus truly shared the same temperament and opinions. Thus, Yu Wei knew a few things about Ninelotus' background.

Ninelotus gave Ning a resigned glance. "It's all because of him."

"Him?" Yu Wei felt as though Ninelotus' glance was a bit...strange. It didn't seem like a glance between fellow disciples; rather, it seemed like a glance between Dao-Companions, whose emotions and feelings were linked together.

Ning walked over, taking Ninelotus by the hand. He didn't know what to say. After hesitating for a while, he only said three words: "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine...it was just a bit stuffy there. Still, now that I'm out, in the future, the Dongyan clan won't interfere in our matters again." Ninelotus looked at Ning, her eyes filled with delight.

"Won't interfere?" Ning couldn't help but reveal a look of delight as well. The Dongyan clan's interference had always been a source of worry for Ning. Now, everything was fine, and his worries dissipated like smoke in the wind.

“The two of them...?”

Yu Wei looked at Ning and Ninelotus. She couldn't help but feel stunned.

“I had no idea...that the two of them became Dao-Companions!” Adept Vastriver began to roar with laughter.

“Senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, you actually formed Dao-Companions without telling me?!” Northson roared as well.

As for Yu Wei, she just stood there quietly, keeping that calm, faint smile on her face.

Credits

Translator: [Iewatermelons](#)

Epub: [Estevam](#) / [dotNOVEL](#)